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THE NEW REPUBLIC



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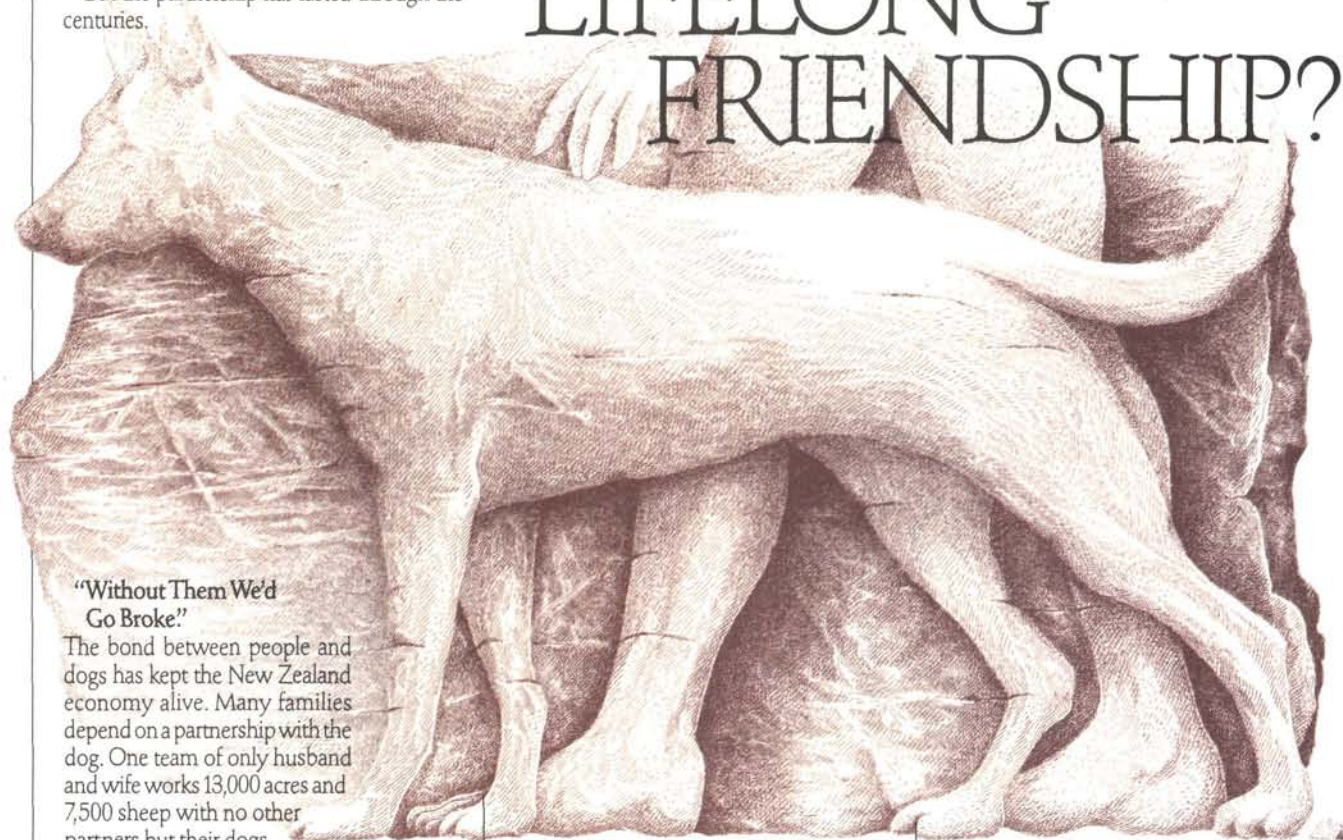
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MARCH 13, 1989

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FROM WASHINGTON

HEMISPHERIC BIGTHINK

Right now the United States hasn't got a foreign policy, it's got an answering machine. "We can't come to the phone at the moment," goes the global geostrategic vision emanating from the White House and the State Department, "but please leave a message and we'll get back to you. Eventually."

Wherever you look, the Bush administration has a "policy review" instead of a policy. This may not yet matter all that much in terms of relations with the Soviet bloc, since Mikhail Gorbachev's supply of ideas, many of which sound as

if an American thought of them, is ample enough for two superpowers. It matters rather more in the Middle East, where Palestinians, Israelis, Jordanians, Russians, and even Swedes are furiously creating new realities while the United States stands timidly to one side, wondering whether or not to clear its throat. And it matters most of all, just now, in Latin America.

Latin America offers a vivid instance of George Bush's most conspicuous piece of good luck, which is that massive political and economic changes around the world have created equally massive opportunities. In Latin America a fortuitous convergence of factors—some global and some regional, some positive and some negative, some evanescent and some long-lasting—has opened the way for grand solutions the way a planetary alignment makes possible a "grand tour" by a single spacecraft.

The factors include the winding down of the cold war, which undermines the strategic rationale for Washington's lingering obsession with the Sandinistas; the emergence of a critical mass of democratic governments, albeit fragile ones, among the big countries of South America; the collapse of messianic revolution-

ary fantasies and belief in the economic viability of state cartels; the nominal agreement in surprising quarters (Salvadoran guerrillas, Paraguayan generals) with the growing consensus that free, regular elections are the only basis for governmental legitimacy; and the debt crisis, a multifaceted threat to the economies and politics of Latin America that imaginative leadership from the White House could transform into a multipurpose tool for democratization, development, and hemispheric cooperation.

Fifteen years ago South America had only two functioning democracies; today it has only two dictatorships, one of which, Paraguay, has just got rid of its dictator. The Caribbean is entirely democratic except for Cuba and Haiti. Mexico's political system is opening up. The region's democratic institutions are mostly new and weak, but some of its democratic leaders are seasoned and strong: Argentina's Raúl Alfonsín, Costa Rica's Oscar Arias, Jamaica's Michael Manley, and, especially, Venezuela's Carlos Andrés Pérez, who turned his inauguration three weeks ago into an occasion for diplomacy rather than display. The commonality of interests among these democratic leaders, the potential for cooperative action against anti-democratic elements both within their societies and outside them, is enormous. And because there are now so many democracies, the much-derided weapons of nonviolent international statecraft—political, economic, and diplomatic pressures and rewards—can actually be deployed to considerable effect.

The key to unlocking this potential lies in the debt crisis, which is sapping the economic and political vitality of the Latin democracies. "Everybody knows the outlines of a debt settlement," says former Arizona governor Bruce Babbitt, who might now be making hemispheric policy if the Democrats had won last fall. "The banks have to take about a 50 percent hit on debt service. They'd go along because the other half of the debt would be multilaterally guaranteed. The debtor countries would have to implement the kinds of reforms the Mexicans and Chileans are already carrying out: dismantling state-run industries, getting their budgets under control, and so on. All that's required is for the president of the United States to step up and be heard."

A debt settlement would have the growth-spurring effect of a Marshall Plan for Latin America at a fraction of

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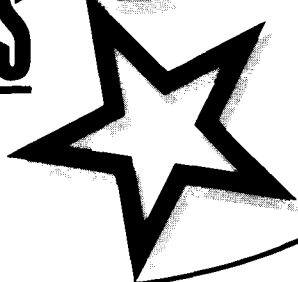
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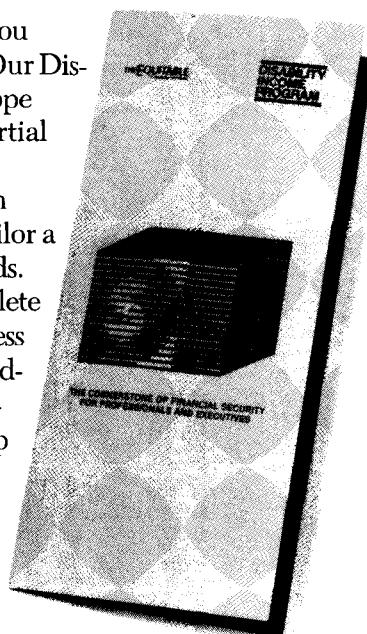
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RISKY BUSINESS

To the editors:

Henry Fairlie's article on the irrationality of public attitudes toward risk ("Fear of Living," January 23) addresses an important public policy issue, but is off the mark. First, unwillingness to take unnecessary risks is not a sign of timorousness or a flaw in the American character, but of maturity of judgment. No sensible person willingly takes such risks. Second, Fairlie's argument that the American legal system cannot distinguish between negligence and bad luck is wrong. Opponents of the tort system can wheel out occasional horror stories, but research has shown that the system does a reasonable job of sorting out bad claims. If anything, it is weighted against the victim. On the other hand, the threat of lawsuits encourages greater care among those whose actions may harm others. It was only after medical malpractice suits that it became standard practice to hold "sponge counts" to keep loose surgical apparatus from being sewed up in patients. In Fairlie's example in which a

woman sued two Frisbee-tossers, the judge threw the case out of court. Isn't that the way it's supposed to work?

I suppose Fairlie is trying to say that Americans are no longer willing to be exposed to serious risks without their knowledge, consent, or without just compensation. This is not an issue of risk per se, but of justice. If I choose to expose myself to possibly deadly radiation, that is a question of risk. If I knowingly expose my neighbor or employee to radiation without her knowledge or consent, the issue is not risk aversion, but willful harm to another. Similarly, when a corporation pollutes a river, the issue is not risk, but the right to impinge on others.

Finally, taking risks should not be confused with poor judgment. Fairlie's invocation of Vietnam seeks to do exactly that. To palm off this tragedy, initiated by policy-makers unwilling to understand history and pursuing unclear aims, as a risk gone bad is the worst sort of irresponsibility.

D. ANDREW AUSTIN
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

To the editors:

Make sure that Henry Fairlie stands only on OSHA-approved stepladders, lest we lose one of the most incisive and trenchant observers of the American scene. "Fear of Living" strikes a deadly blow at this new class of nitwit Luddites and Savonarolas who would immobilize the nation. Having done battle for years with the Safety Nazis in the world of automobiles, I can attest that this virulent timorousness, coupled with the nanynism in government and the gluttony of the trial lawyers, threatens us more than a hundred Chernobyl meltdowns.

Perhaps the greatest racing driver of all time was Tazio Nuvolari, who drove with such a crazed style that he was thought to have a pact with the devil. Nuvolari was once asked why he risked his life at lunatic speeds. He replied to his questioner thusly; "How do you wish to die?" "In bed, of course," was the reply. "Then, from where," quizzed Nuvolari, "do you summon the courage to turn out the lights each night?"

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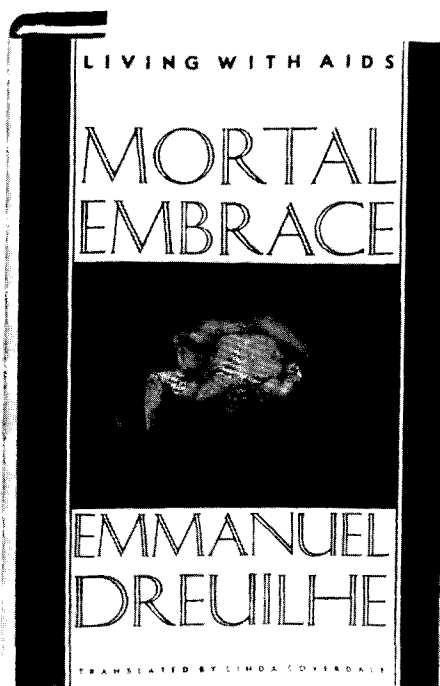
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To the editors:

As an aficionado of good satire, I was pleased to find Henry Fairlie's story, which portrays a delightful imaginary world and mischievously advances a corporatist message under an all-American banner. A totally ignorant reader (fortunately TNR, I'm sure, has few) would get the impression that the problem with this country is that the regulatory agencies and the courts are running amok. In Fairlie's America, the EPA is protecting the environment too much, the FDA and the CPSC are fighting too hard for consumers, and the NRC is hamstringing the nuclear power industry. Even worse, runaway juries are scaring the bejeesuz out of responsible corporate citizens (like the asbestos companies) by forcing them to pay far more than they should to their "alleged" victims. In this version of the USA, it is a loss to us all that the Dalkon Shield and the Ford Pinto are no longer on the market.

The real message isn't about *whether* we should take more risks, it's about *who* should bear the costs. And the answer (surprise, surprise) is big corporations should take more risks and reap the profits, while consumers and workers should

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

MARCH 13, 1989

TWO CHEERS FOR BLASPHEMY

For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as the soul whose progeny they are. . . . [A]s good almost kill a man as kill a good book: who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. . . . We should be wary, therefore, what persecution we raise against the living labors of public men, how we spill that seasoned life of man preserved and stored up in books; since we see a kind of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdom . . .

—John Milton, *Areopagitica*

In the West, we read Milton and More and Galileo and Spinoza and Locke and Voltaire and Jefferson and Mill and Mann and Sakharov a little smugly, since they won. Glibly we attach a historical inevitability to the triumph of their spirit. We praise their courage, and flatter ourselves that we would have stood with them, that none of our loyalties to family, society, religion, and state would have interfered with our loyalty to freedom. After all, we know about the debt that democracy owes to heresy. The proper course of our thoughts and our actions would have been plain.

The persecution of Salman Rushdie and *The Satanic Verses* should dispel this triumphalism, and humble. It is, by the standards of our history, a classic affair: a man of the word against a man of the Word, the power of the word against the power of the powers. But look, Rushdie is more or less alone. He has only the resources of his soul and his wife and Scotland Yard to sustain him, while politicians, writers, publishers, and booksellers run for cover. By now many of the still, silent ones have been roused, or shamed, into finding their voice. But the complacency of the Western literary world the morning after the Ayatollah "sentenced" Rushdie to death, its overwhelming failure to treat Rushdie's enemy like the enemy of us all, continues to shock. In a moment of truth, we acted like heirs gone to seed.

It has been a long time, of course, since an Ayatollah darkness was a part of our experience. Even Rushdie seems to have forgotten, in the writing of his extraordinary book, the magnitude of an established faith's fury. "What the

religious fundamentalists are saying," the stunned writer told a reporter before he was forced to flee, "is: 'God sent the Koran. Full stop. End of discussion.'" Well, yes. The zealot is a man without irony. He is not interested in wit. He detests doubt. He fears complexity. He consecrates violence. As the campaign against him escalated, Rushdie began to grasp that he was caught in a conflict between absolutes. "Frankly, I wish I'd written a more critical book," he bravely told British television. "I call upon the intellectual community in this country and abroad to stand up for freedom of the imagination, which is an issue much larger than my book or indeed my life." One day the Muslim world may remember that sentence gratefully, may look back fondly upon its late-20th-century Anglo-Indian Voltaire.

"It is not true," said Rushdie, "that this book is a blasphemy against Islam." But alas, it is true. It will profit nothing to teach the zealot about the techniques of magical realism, to plead that the prostitutes who are given the names of the Prophet's wives appear in a dream sequence, that the novel is a satire whose subject is madness, that art invents. The zealot is a man of literal meanings. More to the point, however, blasphemy is nothing to be ashamed about. It is a birthpang of democracy.

Remember that Europe was once a stifled, theocratic, feudal, crusading society, which was kept by a powerful church in what Milton called "a perpetual childhood of prescription"; and it was blasphemy that pushed open the shutters. The insult to the church served as an instrument of knowledge. Neither science nor art could proceed without offending. And as truth was added to, cruelty was subtracted from: tolerance for thoughts and thinkers that rebelled against the church and its compulsion became the very measure of justice. Two cheers for blasphemy, then; and for Rushdie's blasphemy, too.

We are hearing a lot about the hurt feelings of Muslims, particularly from the representatives of Muslim organizations on American television. But it is Rushdie, not Khomeini, who is running for his life. And it is *The Satanic*

Verses, not the Koran, that is banned and burned. Do the people who put a match to Rushdie's book in England, who demand that it be withdrawn from bookstores in the United States, understand where they are living? If they cannot celebrate the pluralism of their adopted countries, they had better swallow it. In these countries we are dogmatic about tolerance. We hold communities high, but not at the cost of democracy. We hold that the right of the believer to protest against the blasphemer is precisely the right of the blasphemer to blaspheme.

For the believer, it is confusing, no doubt, to live in a society in which his truth counts only as an opinion. And it is doubly confusing for the immigrant believer, who wants liberty no less than authenticity, who carries his traditions willingly to a culture that puts them in peril, who wants to be a Muslim and a modern. Sometimes the pressures of freedom are fantastic, as the immigrant defends himself against the object of his own desire. It is easy to understand why immigrants feel threatened. It is less easy to understand why they make threats. And the bad joke is that few writers have written more obsessively than Rushdie about the contradictions of which he now is the victim.

We are also hearing a lot about Western ignorance of Islam, about insulting stereotypes of Muslims in the media, and so on. There is no denying the coarseness of much that journalists say and write about the Muslim world. Nor should we, in the West, gloat. "The individual" was not "born" somewhere in Paris sometime around 1789; enlightenment in the West was an accomplishment of many centuries, during which many books and many people were immolated. But in the Rushdie affair the West has not a thing to apologize for. In truth, the West is the poor man's only hope. Let us call this the Islamabad irony. When the mobs in Islamabad marched against Rushdie's book before the American cultural center, many were baffled by the association. In fact, the association was beautifully appropriate. If you are for the banning and the burning of books, if you deny the right of a writer to write and the right of a publisher to publish, if you believe that an opinion may be refuted by a bullet, you are anti-American. The militant mullahs are right. Philosophically and historically, the United States is their enemy. The defender of *The Satanic Verses* is The Great Satan. For this we may be proud.

How to understand these convulsions in Iran, India, Pakistan, and throughout the Muslim world? We are given two kinds of explanations, political and cultural. The political explanation is too forgetting, the cultural explanation is too forgiving.

The political explanation, most clearly stated by Shaul Bakhash in the *Washington Post*, teaches that "Rushdie's novel is not the chief target." Rushdie is trapped, rather, in a bitter fight between "hard-liners" and "pragmatists" over the future of Iran's relationship to the West. "By suggesting that the Rushdie book constitutes an American and CIA plot against an insurgent Islam," writes Bakhash, "the hard-liners make much more difficult any attempt at an Iran-U.S. reconciliation." Obviously there is some truth to this. The Ayatollah must miss the Iran-Iraq war. A *jihad*

would be handy. But there is something a little soothing, too, in this sort of analysis: an epochal struggle between ideals of human life is diminished to inside baseball. We have politics; they have politics. Unfortunately, the analysis cannot account for the eruptions in Bradford and Detroit. More important, we have heard it before—exactly a decade ago, in fact, when the theological program for the Iranian revolution was dismissed as the expression of social and economic unhappiness. But thought, religion, culture turned out to be not quite as epiphenomenal as all that. Nor are they now: the "hard-liners" are opposed to the "normalization" of relations with the West for the very unsophisticated reason that you do not normalize with the devil. The Ayatollah does not want to use Rushdie; he wants to kill him. We must respect the man's sincerity.

The cultural explanation was exemplified by Edward Mortimer, in an astounding piece in the *Financial Times* of London. Rushdie "must have known, when he wrote *The Satanic Verses*, that many Muslims would be unable to take the novel in the playful, sardonic spirit in which it was apparently [!] meant. . . . By naming the book and the characters as he did, Mr. Rushdie clearly courted such a reaction." The point is not quite that the author is responsible for his fate, but that the Muslim world is not quite responsible for its actions. For "many Muslims are very sensitive about attacks on their religion" (as, no doubt, many writers are very sensitive about attacks on their work). "They tend," you see, "to see themselves as a beleaguered community." "Does that mean" (this is the clincher) "that Ayatollah Khomeini is qualified to pass a death sentence in Islamic terms? Most Muslim authorities would say not, but in the eyes of his followers the Ayatollah has assumed a kind of leadership . . ." and so on.

Not an echo of horror here. Only the Orientalism, the patronizing pardon, of the apologist for Islam. Never mind that Islam does not require an apology; not even Khomeini can compromise his entire faith. Never mind that such apologetic sensitivity was precisely the reason for Rajiv Gandhi's banning of the book last fall. (South Africa, widely known for its sensitivity to the feelings of the many, banned the book for the same reasons. And Naguib Mahfouz, the Nobel laureate in literature, a secular man who casts a cold eye on clerics, whose own work is banned in his own country, boldly condemned the contract on Rushdie as "intellectual terrorism," and then concurred in the banning of the book in Egypt. Enlightenment works in mysterious ways.) The banning was supposed to prevent violence. Naturally, it had the opposite effect. The masses learned from the government only that they were correct in their judgment of the book. The subcontinent confirmed last week what Europeans can still remember: that the killing of books leads to the killing of people.

Rushdie has been writing for years precisely to banish this kind of condescension from the discussion of Muslim life. A student of Muslim history and a man of the left, he needs no lessons in the impact of imperialism upon Muslim society. He is alive to the fact that Muslims, especially immigrant Muslims, are "beleaguered." But still he holds

them to the standard of truth. He studies their foibles, he burrows into their scars, he insists that they are accountable for the pain they make themselves. All of his novels are written in the confidence that Muslims will survive the mirror of art as well as anybody else. Beauty, of course, is not all that shows in Rushdie's glass. But the self-respect in the reflection is unmistakable.

The same cannot be said, alas, of the American literary community, or of the American political class. Jefferson ("Difference of opinion is advantageous in religion. . . . What has been the effect of coercion? To make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites.") would have been disgusted.

All the nations of the European Community have proudly withdrawn their diplomats from Tehran. Secretary of State James Baker, back from a trip to said community but immune to its influence, conceded on "Meet the Press" that Khomeini's contract on Rushdie is "basically intolerable," but added: "I haven't read the book. I haven't seen the book. I don't know what is said in there. I don't mean to be blessing the book." But he doesn't mean to be cursing its foes, either. Anger is not what he seems to feel about the Ayatollah's call for terrorism in this country. (George Shultz would have spoken plainly.) Presumably the secretary is being advised that it is not in the strategic interest of the United States to let a novel get in the way of an improved relationship with Iran. The Iranian hardliners win in Tehran. The Iranian pragmatists win in Washington. Only after days of silence did the president listlessly utter some words about "deeply offensive" and "held accountable," while reporters were reminded on background that there are American hostages in Lebanon. Hostages, again: first Iran-*contra* then Iran-Rushdie.

Cardinal John O'Connor followed in the secretary's spirit. He, too, "denounced" the Ayatollah's edict. But the cardinal's heart was not in it. "We deplore seeing anyone's religion just treated with seeming contempt and ridicule or treated with anything less than great reverence. It's not for me to talk about what constitutes freedom of speech or what should or should not be censored." His spokesman told reporters that His Eminence "encourages everyone not to dignify the publication of this work, which has been viewed by Muslims as highly sacrilegious and offensive." A man not of the cloth nor the paperback.

Then there are the American writers, slow in the struggle for their ideal, unsteady in the service of their own. There were some—Susan Sontag, William Styron, John Updike, Frances Fitzgerald, Robert Coover, a few others—who threw caution to the winds, like writers. But it is fair to say that in the beginning American writers were almost nowhere to be found. Bookers for television and radio complained loudly that almost nobody would defend Rushdie on the air. The people whose hobby is protest in speech were speechless. Their humanities courses appear to have been wasted on them. "I'd have to be crazy not to have some apprehension," said Arthur Miller, the hero of the House Un-American Activities Committee. "Not going on television is not necessarily a sign of anything."

Norman Mailer announced that he would make his pronouncement in his own time. Rushdie would have to wait. Mailer, it appears, can live with writers endangering other people. It is when other people endanger writers that he thinks twice. (Of course, the controversy about his procrastination was also nice.) And so it went. Meanwhile the *New York Times Book Review* published a review of *The Satanic Verses* that deplored the threats, but conceded that there "are real problems in the book that need to be addressed," and "deep ground for puzzlement, if not complaint," referring to its mockery of religion. And a prominent book critic for a large metropolitan newspaper refused to review *John Dollar* by Marianne Wiggins, who is Rushdie's wife, because a favorable review might make him a target, and he is an honest man.

And finally there were the chains, or what Ted Solotaroff has called, in these pages, "the literary-industrial complex." If any proof is needed of the impact of the corporate mentality upon American publishing in recent years, Waldenbooks, B. Dalton, and Barnes & Noble have provided the proof. Even as Viking/Penguin, Rushdie's dauntless publisher, stood by the book, and independent bookstores nervously kept it on their shelves, it was announced that all these chain stores, 1,250 of them, almost a third of the book trade in the United States, will no longer sell it. These pin-striped booksellers seem to think that the book business is like the shoe business: merely a matter of commerce. They seem not to know that bookstores are one of the most significant institutions of a democracy; that they are vending the sacred objects of a free society; that the sale of a book is the endorsement of a principle; that there is high honor in their work. The Orwellianism of the day was provided by the chief executive officer of B. Dalton, who told the *Washington Post* plaintively that "we have never before pulled a book off our shelves. It is regrettable that a foreign government has been able to hold hostage our most sacred First Amendment principle." Inquisitors, take note: if you do not wish a book to be sold at Waldenbooks, B. Dalton, or Barnes & Noble, just threaten to kill.

As we go to press, the Ayatollah is proclaiming that it is the duty of Muslims "to send [Rushdie] to hell." He is revolting, this man of God without mercy in his heart. Rushdie is underground, hunted, living a nightmare, looking for words that will restore the rest of his days to him without compromising him as a writer. And we, the lucky ones, have been taught, at this late date in the history of infamy, when we still needed the lesson, that democracy can have its martyrs, too. May Salman Rushdie not become one of them.

NOTEBOOK

□ NEWSSTAND ALERT: TNR is being redesigned; next week's issue will look different, from cover to diarist. If you don't find us where we normally are, look closer.

□ **BAKERGATE (CONT'D):** Of the various defenses of James Baker being erected in the wake of his momentous ethical screwup (see "The Banker Plan," TNR, March 6), two warrant particular scrutiny. The first claim made by Baker supporters is that he is too wealthy to have cared about any effect his policies as treasury secretary may have had on the bank stock that, it turns out, he has owned for years. The second claim is that he held on to the stock after becoming treasury secretary not so that he could use his office to boost its value, but because selling it would have entailed large capital gains taxes. If you sense a certain tension between these two points, you're on solid ground. Between mid-December 1987 and the end of May 1988, Baker's ChemBank stock rose in value by 39 percent. Most of that can be attributed with a fair amount of confidence to the Third World debt policies Baker articulated. Since all we know is that Baker's ChemBank holdings totaled at least \$250,000, we can't say how much he made off those policies, but for present purposes it doesn't matter; whatever the sum, it is almost certainly larger than the capital gains tax that, we are told, deterred Baker from selling the stock in the first place (and apparently temporarily deterred him from selling even after the scandal broke). So if the prospect of capital gains taxes was enough to get Baker's attention, then the amount of money he stood to make off his Third World debt policies was high enough to turn his head, too.

□ **WHAT DO YOU MEAN "WE"?** In the interest of full disclosure, it should be noted that some of TNR's editorials are written by outside contributors working in consultation and collaboration with TNR editors. The contributors include: Daniel Farber, the Henry J. Fletcher Professor of Law at the University of Minnesota; Henry Aaron, senior fellow in economics studies at the Brookings Institution; James K. Glassman, TNR contributing editor and editor of *Roll Call*; and Elliot Cohen, of the Naval War College. TNR thanks them for laboring in virtual obscurity.

□ **CORRECTION:** "Rx for the FDA" (February 13) contained a mistake. Contrary to what the article says, the Food and Drug Administration never approved thalidomide for use in the United States.

□ **THE INSCRUTABLE JAPANESE:**

U.S.-JAPAN TALKS CITE COOPERATION

Bush and Takeshita Explore New Ways
to Solve Trade and Other Disputes

—*New York Times*, February 3

Japan Seeks New World Influence

Tells U.S. It Wants Greater Say in Global Political Affairs, Economy

—*Los Angeles Times*, same day
(thanks to Edward D. Hurley, Pacific Palisades, California)

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

THE BIG SCHMOOZE

DURING HIS first week in the White House, President Bush buzzed his secretary and asked her to invite Democratic Senators Robert Byrd and Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia to lunch the next Monday. This was the first that Bush's staff had heard of his interest in conferring with them. The two showed up at noon on January 30, and Bush ushered them into the small study next to the Oval Office. Over lunch, Byrd and Rockefeller talked up a breathtakingly parochial subject, new funding for the Appalachian Regional Commission and for the unfinished highways planned for Appalachia. Rockefeller brought out blue and white maps for Bush to see. "He listened, he asked questions, went over my maps showing how the current highway corridors look like a picture puzzle, and expressed interest in learning more," Rockefeller said later. "I really felt we made progress."

They may or may not have, but Bush definitely did. He made more when he invited all House and Senate freshmen in for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres a few days later. On two other evenings, he hosted committee chairmen from the Senate and then the House in the upstairs living quarters of the White House. Democrat Henry B. Gonzales of Texas, chairman of the House Banking Committee, couldn't make it, and he missed the private briefing by Bush the next week on the administration's S&L bailout. So Bush invited Gonzales to a private dinner on February 18, along with Zbigniew Brzezinski, Patrick Buchanan, Hugh Sidey, Jerry Falwell, and Joe Gibbs, the coach of the Washington Redskins. Bush took everyone on a tour of the bedrooms, and after dinner (Gonzales sat next to Barbara Bush) an Army chorus sang 1940s songs. "Gonzales was just as happy as a jaybird," said Buchanan, who talked to him. "With the S&L thing," adds a White House official, "Gonzales is going to be real important."

In Bush's calculation, all 535 members of Congress are real important. He is pursuing them with the zeal of a missionary, the bonhomie of a restaurateur, and the chumminess of a fraternity rush chairman. Ronald Reagan had a different tack. He thought of folks in Congress as impediments to be overpowered, normally by appealing over their heads to the entire nation on television. Reagan never considered spending his discretionary time—evenings in Washington, weekends at Camp David—with them. Bush's attitude is: my time is your time. When his first weekend at Camp David approached, Bush invited House Speaker Jim Wright and his wife, Betty, to come for a day. (The visit was canceled when Bush got a cold.) Bush is eager to be a friend. And who knows? In the end, it may help him prevail on the only issue that matters in 1989: the budget.

The charm offensive is the most innovative part of



Jack
Kerouac

3 BOOKS, 3 BUCKS. NO COMMITMENT. NO KIDDING.



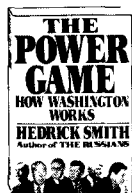
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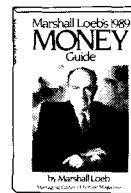
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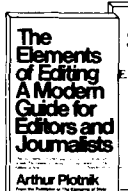
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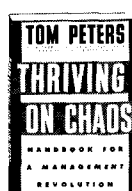


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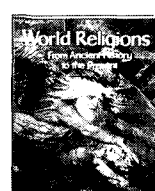
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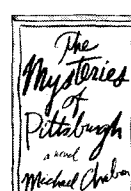
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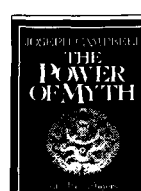
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Bush's strategy. That's probably because it's the most spontaneous. It comes naturally to Bush to treat members of Congress the way he wishes he'd been treated, but wasn't, when he was a House member from 1967 to 1971. Another part of the strategy is Reaganesque. It consists of keeping the public on Bush's side, mainly by sounding conciliatory in speeches and press conferences and stressing the small but supposedly wonderful things he wants to do to make America a nicer place. Bush learned a lesson from his inaugural speech. All but once the interruptions for applause started on the podium. The one exception was when Bush said that bickering between the White House and Congress must cease. "On the podium, you couldn't help but notice," says a senior Bush adviser. "It started far back in the crowd and came rolling in like a wave and engulfed the platform."

Bush returned to this high-road theme in his budget address to Congress on February 9. "The people didn't send us here to bicker," he said. In Manchester, New Hampshire, on February 13, he insisted that "my team and I are prepared to work with the Congress, to negotiate in good faith with the leadership, to work day and night, if that's what it takes, to meet budget targets and to produce a budget on time." And in a speech to the South Carolina legislature on February 17, Bush said he will work with senators and representatives "not as members of competing parties, but as cooperating public servants." Two days later in St. Louis, he said, "I'm committed to working closely with my friends on the Hill." Democrats in Congress may roll their eyes at this rhetoric, but "it's striking a chord with the public," insists a White House official.

THE NEXT PART of the Bush strategy belongs to Richard Darman, the budget chief. He is the lead person in budget negotiations with Congress—or "consultations," as Democrats prefer to call them—and he's off to a fast start. It was Darman who argued that Bush should give his budget speech as early as possible, even before the mid-February recess. This was risky. If the speech had been a dud, members of Congress would have heard nothing but criticism back home. "It could have reinforced the d.o.a. syndrome," says a White House official. Dead on arrival was Darman's biggest fear for the budget. The recent past was not encouraging. Every Reagan budget except his first was declared d.o.a. by members of Congress, including some Republicans. This time Bush was able to boast to the South Carolina legislators that his budget was "getting some attention. And I'm pleased to say no one has said it's d.o.a."

Darman created a 1990 budget that's not easy to attack. "A lot of Democrats are uneasy because it doesn't provide the kind of target they've had in the past," says a Bush aide. With enough specific cuts to criticize, Democrats could dismiss the budget out of hand. To avert that, Darman froze discretionary domestic spending at \$136 billion, the 1989 amount. That means no real or nominal growth. But he didn't put price tags on individ-

ual programs, leaving that unenviable task to Congress. Democrats accused Bush and Darman of being unspecific, but that's not a charge likely to resonate with the public. In response, Darman got slightly specific. He sent the Democratic chairmen of the budget committees a document that gives a breakdown for all the programs under three headings—1989 spending, the freeze proposed by Reagan, and Bush's flexible freeze. What Darman wouldn't deliver is a breakdown based on "current services," which is last year's level of spending adjusted upward for inflation, population growth, etc. Darman has rejected that kind of budgeting, used in Washington for years. Even David Stockman wasn't willing to impose this fundamental change in budgetry. Bush now lampoons "current services" budgets. In South Carolina he repeated a remark he attributed to Republican Senator Warren Rudman of New Hampshire: "Washington is the only town where a man making \$20,000 can ask his boss for a \$10,000 raise, and then when the boss gives him instead a \$5,000 raise, the story comes out, 'Man's Salary Cut by \$5,000.'"

THE BUDGET had a pleasant side effect for Bush. Once it was released, talk of a tax increase this year stopped. Now the conventional wisdom, shared by some Bush aides, is that the president may accept new taxes next year, when the 1991 budget is considered. Neither Bush nor Darman has flatly ruled this out, and Darman's flirtation with a two-year budget agreement makes it all the more likely. In the budget document he sent to Congress, Bush advocated "biennial budgeting." Leon Panetta, chairman of the House Budget Committee, likes the idea. The problem is that Bush would be put under sharper pressure to swallow a tax hike. Trimming the deficit to \$64 billion in 1991 by spending cuts alone would be politically difficult. And putting together a two-year agreement would also take longer than forging a one-year deal. Another obstacle is House Republicans, who'd rather have a one-year accord now and let Democrats be the ones to push for higher taxes next year. So a two-year accord may be beyond Darman's reach.

The final part of the Bush strategy consists of what a senior White House official calls "leadership level negotiations." These are sessions at the White House with Bush and bipartisan leaders of Congress, plus the chairmen of and ranking Republicans on the Appropriations, Senate Finance, and House Ways and Means Committees. Bush held one of these just before he left on February 22 for Japan, China, and South Korea, and scheduled another upon his return. Democratic leaders claim the meetings are just chats, not negotiations. But they can't refuse to come when the president calls, or refuse to negotiate if he makes an offer. These meetings, says the White House official, provide "that extra pressure to stay in the lead and to keep this process from bogging down."

If it bogs down, it won't be for lack of schmoozing by Bush. One contingent from Congress he invited upstairs at the White House was the "core group," early congressional

supporters of his presidential bid. During the inevitable room tour, he told one congressional couple, "Why don't you sit down on the Lincoln bed." They did, and Bush rushed to his bedroom to get his Polaroid. He snapped a picture, signed the back, then repeated this for the other 35 couples. Just the chance to wander around on the second floor of the White House pleased some members of Congress. Edward Kennedy, who chairs the Senate Education and Labor Committee, came for the reception for Senate committee chairmen. He told a colleague it was the first time he'd been there since 1963.

FRED BARNES

Ollie North, suddenly subversive.

OLLIE'S TRUE COLORS

patriot: one who disinterestedly or self-sacrificingly exerts himself to promote the well-being of his country. —*Oxford English Dictionary*

For the past two years, it has been virtually impossible to discuss Lt. Col. Oliver North without first allowing that, whatever else he may be, he certainly is a patriot. The right sees a patriot unfairly shackled by lily-livered congressmen; the left sees a patriot with no sense of legal or practical limits on his actions. Both sides agree, however, that North is on trial today not for his motives (which were pure), but for his zeal (which may have been a bit *trop*).

The liberal view is captured nicely in Ben Bradlee Jr.'s biography, *Guts and Glory: The Rise and Fall of Oliver North*. "North's tragic flaw," according to Bradlee, "was that in his zeal to promote democracy, he helped subvert it; in his desire to protect and defend the Constitution he swore to uphold, he trampled some of its most famous precepts." Conservatives tend to be more rapturous. Patrick Buchanan compares North to those who ran guns to the Jews in British-occupied Palestine following World War II and to the "patriots and radicals" who helped black slaves escape north on the underground railroad. At last spring's Liberty University commencement ceremony, Jerry Falwell went whole hog. "Remember," Falwell reminded his young audience in introducing his honored, indicted keynoter, "we serve a savior who was indicted, convicted, and crucified."

North hasn't exactly discouraged this kind of talk. He told the Liberty graduates that the accusations against him "were not a brand but a badge of honor." And while testifying before the Iran-*contra* committee, with his war medals shimmering in the glare of the klieg lights, he all but wallowed in patriotic kitsch. "This lieutenant colonel is not going to challenge a decision of the commander in chief for whom I still work, and I am proud to work for," he

lectured the committee. "And if the commander in chief tells this lieutenant colonel to go stand in the corner and sit on his head, I will do so."

WELL, as they say in Hollywood, that was then, and this is now. Today, instead of standing on his head for his "commander in chief," he has served him with a subpoena. North and his lawyer, Brendan V. Sullivan Jr., also have threatened to introduce 40,000 pages of secret U.S. national security documents into the public record for all our adversaries to see. They have insisted that in order for North to defend himself adequately, he must blow open at least two secret covert operations—perhaps endangering the lives of those who conducted them—and talk freely about the alleged cover-up of the entire affair. An administration official told the *Washington Post* that to release the material currently demanded by North would constitute a "devastating blow to the intelligence collection capabilities of the government . . . something that could not be compromised." North and Sullivan persisted, however, because, as Sullivan put it, "an individual's liberty is at stake."

What is actually at stake, of course, is an individual's ass. North's "admission" that Reagan, McFarlane, Weinberger, Shultz, and others were all in on the cover-up and had offered third countries a quid pro quo for helping the *contras* amounted to a whiff of grapeshot across the administration's bow. Unless you stop this trial on national security grounds, North and Sullivan seemed to be saying, we'll pull out our really big guns.

The ploy didn't fully succeed; the trial is now under way. But North's threat to the administration remains part of the defense's arsenal. Judge Gerhard Gesell has ruled that Sullivan is free to propose the introduction of classified information in trying to establish that North was just acting on orders from above. (And Attorney General Richard Thornburgh, under the ground rules of the trial, is free to ask for an injunction against such introductions when he deems them a threat to the national security. So the result may be that a fair trial is deemed impossible, in which case the North strategy of holding the national interest hostage will have worked.)

Oliver North certainly has the legal right to try to blow the whistle on covert actions, administration cover-up plans, and still-secret accords. And he may do so for no better reason than that he would like to spend the rest of his life making \$20,000 speeches rather than \$50 license plates.

But it should not pass without mention that this doesn't sound like the Oliver North who once told Congress: "This is a nation at risk in a dangerous world, having the need to conduct covert operations and secret diplomacy, carry out secret programs," and, if these secrets are revealed, "no nation in the world will ever help us again—and we desperately need that kind of help if we are to survive, given our adversaries." Nor does this sound like the Oliver North who told an enraptured audience that he was prepared "to take my own life" at a moment's notice on his high-flying junket to Tehran,

should national security so dictate. What it does sound like is the last refuge of a scoundrel.

ERIC ALTERMAN

Eric Alterman, a senior fellow of the World Policy Institute, is writing a book on Washington pundits for Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

POSTCARD BENIN

PASS THE AMMUNITION

GEN. MATHIEU KERKOU, Benin's head of state, is fond of reminding visitors that 1988 was the first year in some time during which Africa suffered not one coup d'état. Kerekou is particularly proud of his own role as a pillar of stability. He has ruled Benin—a tiny nation sandwiched between Nigeria and the even tinier Togo—for 16 years, while many a government has come and gone in other parts of the continent.

What Kerekou fails to mention is that the only thing stopping a coup in Benin has been the short supply of bullets. Aware that he has the support of no more than 1,000 of the country's 12,000-member armed forces, Kerekou has spent the last few months stashing the military's arms and ammunition under the presidential palace in Cotonou, and at his residence in the Beninese capital of Porto-Novo, the Place des Trois-Banques, which he's turned into a veritable bunker. It's a shrewd strategy, but not shrewd enough: barring a miracle, Benin seems likely to be the site of Africa's first coup in more than a year.

According to Capt. Adabaou Kossa, president of the Mouvement béninois pour la liberté et la démocratie (MBLD), the country's most important opposition organization, the lack of ammo has been a blessing in disguise. During a recent series of strikes by students and civil servants, for example, many more of the protesters might have died—only a dozen in fact were shot down—had soldiers been able to carry out Kerekou's shoot-to-kill orders. Without enough readily available bullets, Kerekou could only imprison the strikers, thereby making Benin, according to a recent Amnesty International report, the West African country with the largest number of political prisoners—at least 250—in its jails.

Among the issues now eroding Kerekou's support are corruption in high places (not least the presidency itself), gross income inequality, and toxic waste. Despite his denials at a recent Organization of African Unity summit, Kerekou has in fact been honoring a contract his government signed in January 1988 with the Anglo-American company SESCO-Gibraltar that calls for Benin to stockpile as much as 50 million tons of toxic wastes over the next ten years. A recent British television documentary reproduced an aerial

photograph, taken by the Franco-Swedish satellite Spot-1, that reveals the existence of a one-kilometer square hole in the ground constructed to store the waste near the Southwest Beninese village of Agon.

None of this sits very well with Nigeria, Benin's immediate neighbor to the East. Nigeria's head of state, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida—who recently declared participation in toxic waste schemes a capital offense—is said to be especially upset. This is bad news for Kerekou, partly because Kossa and Lt. Col. François Kouyami, the MBLD's principal leaders, already enjoy considerable sympathy and support among the Nigerians. Members of the Yoruba tribe situated on the Benin-Nigeria border, Kossa and Kouyami are considered as Nigerian as they are Beninese, and are now headquartered in Lagos, the Nigerian capital.

Then there are Kerekou's problems with his international creditors. With an external debt approaching \$1 billion, Benin has not been able, among other things, to pay its civil servants for the past several months. To remain solvent during the current fiscal year the country needs at least \$350 million, of which the country's traditional financial backer, France, is willing to give at most \$40 million. An IMF-sponsored roundtable to be held this spring in Geneva hopes to persuade Benin's creditor nations to come up with some additional funding. But, says a French financial source familiar with the plight of Benin, this may not come about until one important prerequisite has been fulfilled: the removal of General Kerekou.

PAUL R. MICHAUD

Paul R. Michaud is a former Harvard lecturer and State Department official.

Winnie Mandela self-destructs.

WINNIE THE SHREW

WHEN WINNIE Mandela first fell from grace in mid-February, the Western media were at a loss. Trying to explain her increasingly bizarre behavior—particularly her involvement in the slaying of a 14-year-old boy by her bodyguards—a *New York Times* editorial blamed apartheid; she had been "treated brutally by an evil system," so it was understandable that "she too has become brutal." It's true that Mandela has endured much more than her share of hardship during her struggle against racism. But that only partly accounts for her downfall.

Winnie Mandela was a natural heroine. Here was a beautiful woman married to the imprisoned leader of a revolutionary movement. Her seeming vulnerability and her open defiance made her a magnetic popular symbol—to the Western media no less than to her people. But as inspiring and as telegenic as those qualities made her,

they ultimately contributed less to the success of the anti-apartheid movement than to her own self-destruction.

Winnie was born into a rural family. When she met Nelson Mandela as a young woman, he was a handsome older man, already a national leader of the African National Congress. He was on trial for treason and on the verge of divorcing his first wife. I once asked Arthur Goldreich, an old comrade of Nelson Mandela's who escaped from prison in 1963 and now lives in Israel, what drew the ANC leader to Winnie. "She was beautiful," Goldreich said with a trace of awe in his voice. "She was exquisite." Winnie, though a pioneer in being the first black social worker at a Soweto hospital, had never belonged to any political organization. But her marriage instantly catapulted her into the company of South Africa's leading black politicians. After the banning of the ANC in 1960, Nelson Mandela went underground to launch the ANC's sabotage campaign, and husband and wife saw each other infrequently. When Nelson was captured and sentenced to life imprisonment in 1964, the image of his beautiful wife left alone with two young children drew international sympathy.

THROUGHOUT the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the ANC was effectively suppressed, Winnie Mandela remained in Soweto as a solitary symbol of black resistance. She suffered both restrictions and actual imprisonment, including a total of 491 days in solitary confinement during 1970 and 1971. In contrast to her husband—who appeared remote and forbidding (even his wife sometimes referred to him as "Mandela")—she was approachable. She could be seen, maybe even touched. Her finest moment came in the mid-1970s, when the Black Consciousness movement emerged under the leadership of Steve Biko. While the ANC in exile was wary and fearful of the new movement, Mandela actively supported it. In 1976, when fighting broke out between police and student protesters, Mandela ferried injured students to the hospital in her Volkswagen Beetle and urged youths to get off the streets. "She was very much of a mother to us," recalls Seth Mazibuko, who was a student then. She organized the funeral of the first shooting victim, where she was memorably photographed with her fist in the air.

Not long afterward, Mandela was banished to Brandfort, a small township on South Africa's great plains, where she did not even speak the local language. In the middle of the night, she was dumped in a small house with her younger daughter. She stayed there until late 1985, when a clinic she had founded in Brandfort was firebombed, most likely by angry whites. With black unrest spreading, Mandela packed up, left Brandfort, and moved back to her own home in Soweto, unilaterally ending her exile. The government took no action.

She returned to glory and publicity. By this time the name Mandela, once only whispered, was being shouted in the streets of the townships and scrawled across walls and buildings. Young blacks surged forward to touch Mandela when she appeared at political funerals. She made great

television, a living symbol of defiance, exciting crowds with her blunt rhetoric. A *Newsweek* reporter gushed about her scarf, her beads, her big eyes. When she walked, he wrote, with "her white robes fluttering in the winter wind . . . she held her head high and her chin erect, as if certain that she, and her brothers and sisters, would win."

But Winnie Mandela was ill-suited to the role history had thrust upon her. Her defiance toward Pretoria reflected her more general, and ultimately dangerous, belief that she could do as she pleased. And the vulnerability that won her sympathy and admiration was all too real. She was vulnerable to depression, to loneliness, to the flattery of admirers and informers alike, and to the intoxicating effects of power and privilege. Her own mercurial nature and dubious judgment did more harm to her reputation than the security police could ever do. Before long, rumors about indiscretions in her personal life, about her extravagance, and about her arrogance eroded the worshipful admiration that had grown during her exile.

Her political judgment, meanwhile, was manifestly bad. When black clergymen and political leaders were trying to stop young blacks from killing suspected informers by burning gasoline-doused tires around their necks, she gave a speech saying that "with our matchboxes and necklaces, we shall liberate" South Africa. Exiled ANC members were shocked. One called and urged her not to make any speeches for a while. Mandela responded by putting an answering machine on her phone so she wouldn't have to answer calls from the ANC. Finally the ANC sent a message by courier asking her to "take that fucking machine off the phone." When the ANC finally got through to her on the phone, she chortled, "Is that any way to talk to an old friend?"

Mandela began to subordinate political causes to personal comfort. She threatened to ruin Operation Hunger after the relief organization fired three of her followers for stealing sacks of food and leaving them at her house. In one of her more celebrated mistakes, she began to build a new residence. Nelson had forbidden her from knocking down their existing home, which he said should be preserved for historical reasons. So she constructed a California-style mansion on a prominent knoll, flaunting wealth in a township of two- and four-room houses that are inhabited by an average of 11 people. "That's not a house; that's a whole village," another black leader, Albertina Sisulu, once muttered. After Sisulu prevented an irate group of Soweto residents from burning down the Mandela home, Mandela refused to speak to her, regarding her as a rival.

The contrast between these two people is instructive. In some ways, they resemble one another. Sisulu's husband, Walter, is the highest ranking member of the ANC in prison. (He was secretary general, and Nelson Mandela was national organizer and head of the military unit.) Walter Sisulu was sentenced to life in prison along with Nelson Mandela, leaving Sisulu to care for the children. Like Mandela, Sisulu has been banned, placed under house arrest, and detained.

But the similarities stop there. Albertina Sisulu has worked within community and women's organizations

that Winnie Mandela has refused to join, an important distinction in a country whose disfranchised blacks put a premium on democratic process. When the United Democratic Front, the main anti-apartheid coalition, was formed in 1983, it elected Sisulu as its co-president, not Mandela. When young radicals lost their heads, Sisulu tried to hold them back while Mandela egged them on. When the township of Soweto selected delegates to negotiate an end to the two-and-a-half-year rent boycott, Sisulu was one of the five chosen; Mandela at one point had been paying her rent in order to get construction permits for her half-completed mansion. While Mandela has surrounded herself with thuggish bodyguards, Sisulu usually walks to work by herself. The most powerful woman in South Africa can be seen trudging alone past shacks and through garbage to a clinic where she works as a nurse. To black South Africans, it was no surprise that in February 1988 the government placed restrictions on Sisulu while leaving Mandela free. In fact, were it not for Mandela's telegenic beauty, Sisulu would be the most sought after woman in black politics. But the stout and unglamorous Sisulu remains an obscure figure to most Americans.

Many U.S. commentators say that "the Winnie affair" has damaged the anti-apartheid movement. But if anything, the response of anti-apartheid groups has revealed the strengths of the South African opposition. Unlike African countries that have clung to corrupt and power-crazed leaders, unlike Western countries that have covered up the improprieties of their leaders, the "mass democratic movement" has made a clear declaration of its principles by exposing and disavowing Mandela's actions.

In 1988, when two youths testified to being beaten by the Mandela Football Club—a.k.a. Winnie Mandela's bodyguards—a committee of Soweto community leaders launched an elaborate backstage effort to save Mandela from herself. But she failed to disband her bodyguards, who then kidnapped four more youths and brought them back to Mandela's house, killing the youngest. The only outsider to see the youths while they were at the house was the respected Indian physician Abubaker Asvat. But the next day Asvat—who worked with Albertina Sisulu—was himself gunned down in his office by two assailants. Fed up, the leaders of the anti-apartheid movement went public with their dispute. While acknowledging Mandela's own suffering, the statement they issued also said, "The democratic movement has uncompromisingly fought against violations of human rights from whatever quarters. We are not prepared to remain silent when those who are violating human rights claim to be doing so in the name of the struggle against apartheid. . . . We are of the view that Mrs. Mandela has abused the trust and confidence which she has enjoyed over the years. . . . Often her practices have violated the spirit and ethos of the democratic movement."

There was no split inside South African black politics over this statement. It was written after consultation with the past and current heads of the South African Council of Churches, the spokesman and co-president of the United Democratic Front, the head of the Release Mandela Cam-

paign, leaders of the country's biggest black trade union federation, the general secretary of the mineworkers' union, and assorted others—black leaders from every walk of life, every generation of protest, every province.

The difficulties that these leaders overcame in casting out Winnie Mandela should not go unappreciated. Many blacks feel that protecting Nelson Mandela's wife is part of their responsibility to him. But Nelson Mandela has made things easier for them by placing political considerations above personal ones. Despite his dependence upon his wife as his link with the outside world, he has not taken her side against fellow blacks. When he learned of her mansion, he ordered construction halted. When she tried to profit by giving American businessmen of dubious repute power to market the Mandela name, he repudiated the deal. Similarly, he endorsed the censure of his wife and urged her to disband her "soccer team." Only after she complied did the anti-apartheid movement re-establish contacts with her, and even then only at arm's length. "She wanted to have her little kingdom," said Mazibuko, formerly one of Mandela's most ardent admirers. "And now that kingdom is exploding."

At a meeting at Duke University in February, ANC information director Thabo Mbeki tried to put the best face on the Winnie Mandela scandal. "She's lived without her husband for 27 years now. During that 27 years she has been in and out of prison. She has been banished from her house in Johannesburg and had her houses burned down. She has been an outstanding participant in the liberation struggle." (A member of the audience noted that he used the word participant, instead of leader.) Mbeki added, "We shall have to be very careful now. The same government that banished her and imprisoned her husband cannot be expected to do anything but seek the destruction of this outstanding opponent of apartheid." If the South African authorities are truly bent on her destruction, the most effective strategy might be to leave her alone.

STEVEN MUFSON

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Where were you in '62?

CUBAN GRAFFITI

AFTER THE outbreak of the First World War, Prince von Bülow, the ex-chancellor of Germany, asked his successor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, how things had slipped out of control. Bethmann-Hollweg replied, "Ah, if only I knew." Because the 1962 Cuban missile crisis is the closest the cold war came to World War III, Western scholars have studied it intensively. But they have been hin-

dered by a lack of access to the Soviet side of the story. Aside from Khrushchev's memoirs, sometimes treated as suspect, the only Soviet studies available have been turgid tracts devoid of fact and full of blame for the West.

Glasnost has changed that. In January top-level Soviet participants in the crisis met with their American counterparts in Moscow. Around the table sat Kennedy administration alumni McGeorge Bundy, Robert McNamara, Theodore Sorensen, and Pierre Salinger; former Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko; Ambassadors Anatoly Dobrynin and Alexander Alekseev; and the sons of Khrushchev and Deputy Prime Minister Anastas Mikoyan. Also present were Cuban participants in the crisis and assorted scholars. Much new information came to light, and some of it, as hoped, holds lessons for the future. In particular, current questions about modernizing the U.S. ground-based nuclear missile force came into sharper focus.

WESTERN scholars have long wondered why the Soviets placed the missiles in Cuba. Speculations ranged from a desire to put pressure on the United States for a settlement of the Berlin question to an attempt to solidify Soviet leadership in the emerging rivalry with China. The answer seems closer to the twin motives mentioned in Khrushchev's memoirs: to deter an American invasion of Cuba, and to redress the nuclear imbalance.

Both Cubans and Soviets expected a full-scale American invasion after the failure of the American-supported invasion by Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. Recently declassified American documents indicate that the United States did move troops and pre-position ammunition in keeping with contingency plans for an invasion. And infiltration teams sent to Cuba under Operation "Mongoose" fueled Cuban and Soviet suspicions that an invasion was imminent. McNamara and Bundy denied that Kennedy would have actually launched an invasion, but McNamara admitted that had he been a Cuban or Soviet analyst in 1962, he would have expected one.

Khrushchev, a believer in proletarian revolution, felt frustrated when his top military adviser, Marshal Malinovsky, warned him that Soviet conventional forces could not protect Castro's regime. In addition, Khrushchev felt pinched by the American bases surrounding the U.S.S.R. and wanted Kennedy to feel the same anxiety. In the words of one Soviet participant, he wanted "to put a hedgehog in the Americans' pants."

Soviet strategic inferiority added to Khrushchev's anxiety. The Soviets disclosed in Moscow that they had only 20 intercontinental ballistic missiles at the time of the crisis, rather than the 75 attributed to them by the United States. Meanwhile, the United States had more than 229 ground-based missiles, as well as sea-based and air-based nuclear arsenals far superior to the Soviets'. The placing of 66 medium- and intermediate-range missiles in Cuba wouldn't have substantially narrowed this gap, but it would have more than tripled the Soviets' ability to threaten the United States directly—as opposed to threatening

U.S. forces and allies in Europe—with a nuclear strike.

The outcome of the crisis, it turns out, was a less clear-cut victory for the United States than some earlier accounts indicated. There were three ways to remove the missiles—"shoot 'em out, squeeze 'em out [by blockade], or buy 'em out," and Kennedy apparently relied in part on the last option. The threat of force was undoubtedly important, but there was also a deal—a much more explicit promise to remove obsolete American missiles in Turkey than Robert Kennedy's book, *Thirteen Days*, describes. Why did the Soviets collude for so long in keeping this secret, and thus protect the United States from the wrath of its NATO allies? In part because that was the deal, but also because they would have offended Castro if they had admitted to using Cuban missiles as a bargaining chip.

TRADITIONALLY, some Western analysts have argued that the American victory was Pyrrhic because it led to a massive Soviet nuclear buildup in the 1960s and early '70s. They cite Ambassador Vasily Kuznetsov's comment to John McCloy after the crisis that "you will never be able to do this to us again." However, in a side conversation at the Moscow conference, a Soviet general revealed that the Soviets had laid out a 15-year nuclear program in 1960, and that the buildup would have progressed with or without the crisis. Like Eisenhower in the 1950s, Khrushchev had decided that nuclear forces are cheaper than conventional forces and was trying to get "more bang for the ruble."

Both Kennedy and Khrushchev have been criticized for underplaying their hands. Some Soviet and Cuban participants felt their side could have gotten more in the settlement, just as some Americans have argued that Kennedy should have insisted on the removal of Castro as well as the missiles. Using a memorable mixed metaphor, Gen. Maxwell Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1962, said we had the Soviets "on the run," but we "offered them a piece of cake." But these arguments from both sides, though easy to make in retrospect, discount the frame of mind of both Kennedy and Khrushchev in October 1962: both leaders sensed that matters could slip out of their control.

On October 27 an American U-2 reconnaissance plane strayed into Soviet airspace in what could have been interpreted as preparation for a pre-emptive strike. On the same day Soviet forces shot down another U-2 over Cuba, leading to strong pressure on Kennedy for military retaliation. According to Soviet participants, the shootdown was not authorized by Moscow, which had given orders not to fire unless attacked. Soviet generals, given only two minutes to respond to the intruder, had exceeded their authority.

All Khrushchev knew was that an American had been killed without Moscow giving the command. When Bobby Kennedy told Dobrynin on October 27 that it was essential to come to an agreement by the next day, both sides saw it less as an ultimatum than as a statement of fact. On the next day, a Sunday morning, Khrushchev took the extraordinary step of openly broadcasting his agreement to remove the missiles because he did not

trust the slow diplomatic communications of that time.

Certainly one of the lessons of the Cuban crisis is to be wary about drawing simple lessons. Times change. New crises would involve different ratios of nuclear and conventional forces. New military technologies promise greater prospects of control in some ways, but leave less time to react. The domestic political configuration is also different (again, in part because of new technologies). It is hard to imagine a president today enjoying a week's immunity from press and congressional pressure while he formulated his responses privately. If that week had not existed, the first, more bellicose responses discussed in October 1962—such as an air strike—might have become policy.

STILL, there are some enduring lessons here, particularly in the realm of nuclear deterrence. Deterrence theory has become somewhat like a theology, with simple statements of faith often bolstered by elaborate, obscure, and sometimes irrelevant arguments. There are complex game theory models and intricate counts of draw-down curves. Fine calculations warn about marginal advantages and dangerous windows of vulnerability.

Such analyses usually recommend expensive new acquisitions. In 1981, for example, the public was told that the Soviets had superiority because of their hypothetical ability to carry out a first strike against the 20 percent of the American nuclear force in land-based silos. It was not that the Soviets would actually strike (we still had enormous capability for retaliation), but that the marginal differences in ICBMs would give the Soviets coercive political power. We would be pushed around in Europe or the Persian Gulf unless we closed the window quickly. The decision as to how to cut the Soviet advantage is now being made in the Bush administration, and the current favorites for the job are mobile Midgetman missiles and mobile MX missiles.

The Cuban crisis provides a rare glimpse into how real leaders behave when faced with the unprecedented destructive power of nuclear weapons. And it shows that deterrence is both more fragile and more robust than some theorists have considered.

Deterrence is fragile in the sense that even clear-cut nuclear superiority appears not to be a reliable deterrent against adventurism on the part of an adversary. Before the crisis, Khrushchev was at a massive strategic nuclear disadvantage, and Kennedy openly warned him not to put missiles in Cuba. According to window of vulnerability enthusiasts, Khrushchev should have been intimidated into inaction. Instead he took the largest gamble in postwar Soviet foreign policy. Nor do more recent events bear out the idea that a nuclear advantage translates into commensurate political advantage. During the 1980s the Soviet Union added more warheads than did the United States, and American ICBMs became more vulnerable. Yet the political victories of the 1980s went more to the United States—in Afghanistan and Angola, for example—than to the Soviet Union. In scientific terms, one might say that the window of vulnerability hypothesis was falsified. But in politics, conclusions are never simple.

Nuclear deterrence is robust in the sense that, as the threat of a nuclear war grows, national leaders can become rapidly less aggressive. After the U-2 shootdown, when he sensed a loss of control, Khrushchev quickly settled even though he might have gotten more out of Kennedy by holding out. Kennedy, too, might have gotten a better deal by delaying. But the thought of even a few nuclear weapons landing on American cities induced great caution among American policy-makers, despite both nuclear and conventional superiority.

IN SHORT, before a crisis, conventional capabilities are more important to deterrence than nuclear superiority. But during a crisis, a little nuclear fear goes a long way. Robust deterrence rests on strong conventional forces with an adequate nuclear arsenal in the background.

Translated into contemporary terms, the moral of the story is that, though modernization of our ground-based missiles is in order, it needn't be a crash program. The reason we need to modernize is to ensure against the possibility that Soviet technological innovation could someday render our air-based and sea-based missiles vulnerable. The reason there is no great hurry is that those two legs of our triad are not going to become vulnerable in the next few years—and, as we've seen, there is no other urgent reason to modernize; reducing a marginal Soviet nuclear advantage won't necessarily pay any geopolitical dividends. Though it is time to start a land-based missile modernization program, the program needn't be so dramatic as to divert great resources from the conventional arms budget, where incremental modernization *can* have commensurate power payoffs.

Perhaps the best lesson from the Cuban case is to be wary about the myth of control and about too rationalistic a view of history. Even with careful planning, history always has its accidents. For example, Colonel Penkovsky, a U.S. spy, was arrested soon after Kennedy announced the blockade on October 22. Penkovsky had two special codes he could send the Americans in the event of emergency: one regarding his arrest, and one warning of a surprise nuclear attack. He sent the latter. Fortunately, when it was received in the CIA, it was regarded by working-level officials as unreliable and not sent up the line.

When Bethmann-Hollweg and the kaiser of Germany indulged in brinksmanship in August 1914, they expected to repeat the success Germany had enjoyed when it forced Russia to back down in the Bosnian crisis that von Bülow had managed in 1908. But von Bülow later noted that he had warned Bethmann not to try to emulate him. The most unambiguous lesson to be drawn from reconsidering the Cuban missile crisis is that political leaders should not try to repeat it.

JOSEPH S. NYE JR.

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How the big banks spell debt 'relief.'

ROBBIN' HOODS

BY JEFFREY SACHS

LAST SEPTEMBER American banks were singing the praises of their latest "debt relief" agreement with a Latin American nation. Citicorp, which had led the banks in negotiations with Brazil, said the resulting deal contained the "most extensive and innovative menu of options of any package to date." Five months later the deal is virtually dead. Brazil has descended more deeply into economic crisis, with an inflation rate that exceeds 2,000 percent. The Brazilians have suspended the agreement, and President Jose Sarney warned recently that the March interest bill could go unpaid. With the ink on the September agreement barely dry, the Brazilian government is once again searching for new financing.

Were the banks foolish? Did they overestimate the power of their agreement with Brazil? No, the banks knew exactly what they were doing: lulling the public, claiming to have found a solution to Brazil's debt problem, when in fact their overriding motivation was short-term profit. The September agreement, notwithstanding Citicorp's sunny rhetoric, was plainly unrealistic. It forced Brazil to use billions of dollars in scarce foreign exchange reserves to pay all of its overdue interest. These payments were completed last fall, leading to record profits for big American banks in the fourth quarter of 1988.

It was clear from the beginning that the payments might well trigger runaway inflation. But this prospect didn't deter the banks, for two reasons. First, they are notoriously shortsighted. (Remember, they helped create the debt crisis.) Second, they knew that even if putting the squeeze on Brazil left it incapable of continuing its payments, someone else could probably be convinced to pick up the tab: the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, or the U.S. government (in all three cases, read "American taxpayers"). Indeed, over the past few years, the largest banks have succeeded remarkably in using other people's money to shield themselves from the fallout of the bad loans they made in the 1970s.

The gap between rhetoric and reality has never been as wide as it is now. The banks continue to tout their constructive role highly. (They have been "innovative in responding to the financing needs of the debtors," says a recent study by the bankers' lobby, the Institute of International Finance.) And they continue to refuse to offer real debt relief. Meanwhile Latin American nations, many of

them frail democracies, continue to sink into unprecedented chaos. There is hyperinflation in Argentina, Brazil, and Peru. There is a high risk of political instability in these countries as well as in Mexico. And a growing number of nations are far behind on their debt payments, including Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, and Peru.

In persisting with their upbeat rhetoric, the large U.S. banks are trying to hide a simple truth—that a real solution to the crisis would require them to accept a significant loss on their loans, by reducing the interest or reducing the principal. The longer the banks can manage to conceal that fact, the better their chances of shifting the losses to others, notably you.

You can say lots of nasty things about this strategy, but you can't say it hasn't worked. There are about 40 countries, with 800 million people, in financial distress over the debt crisis. Since 1982 these countries have signed over 90 "debt restructuring" agreements with the banks. Many of these countries don't have a prayer of servicing more than a tiny fraction of their debts in the long term. Yet there hasn't been a single restructuring in which the commercial banks have agreed to submarket interest rates, or to an across-the-board cut in the amount of debt.

Instead, there have been various more convoluted forms of "relief," virtually none of which fulfill the meaning of that word. The big banks have lately become quite adept at flashing around refinancing tools that have impressive-sounding names—debt-equity swaps, "voluntary" debt reduction—but that either have no real effect or actually compound the debt crisis.

In rejecting the call for straightforward debt reduction, the banks say that Latin America's problems are self-inflicted. That is partly true, and there is no doubt that Latin America needs economic reform—more responsible fiscal policy, and the loosening up of markets and of trade policy. Further, this reform should precede, not follow, debt reduction. But bold reforms have already been forthcoming in many countries, including Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, (most recently) Venezuela, and, most important, Mexico, which has slashed its budget deficit and its tariffs and joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Reforms could be extracted from Brazil and other countries, too. The problem is that reforms can't be sustained without a significant reduction of the debt burden. The debtor governments need economic breathing space to impose reforms. And besides, no leader can gain

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support for reforms that have little payoff at home and instead serve mainly to facilitate interest payments to foreign banks.

At its core, the sound solution to the debt crisis is comparable to a simple bankruptcy case, in which the debtor's burden is comprehensively reduced, and all creditors share the losses. This is almost invariably to the collective benefit of the creditors; after reducing the debt to a reasonable amount, they can expect to receive that amount in full, whereas leaving the debt at its original level could worsen the debtor's crisis and lead to a complete halt of payments. Still, individual creditors may try to resist comprehensive debt reduction, and get other creditors to absorb the losses. Bankruptcy law arose for this very reason; bankruptcy judges impose settlements in which all creditors share the burden and all ultimately benefit.

In the debt crisis that now faces developing countries, there is no bankruptcy judge. Instead, agreements are fashioned by a few big banks sitting on committees that negotiate with the debtor nations. The biggest U.S. banks—led by Citicorp and including the Bank of America, Manufacturers Hanover, Chase Manhattan, and Chemical Bank—have systematically resisted an orderly solution to the crisis (a simple cut in interest rates, say), because they have had the incentive and the opportunity to pawn off some of their losses on other players in the game, including the smaller banks as well as the taxpayer.

THEIR surprising ally in this game of delay and buck-passing has been the U.S. Treasury. It has exercised its influence within the International Monetary Fund to keep the IMF from stepping in and playing the role of bankruptcy judge. The Treasury has also, under the Baker plan, sent a clear message to debtor countries: if you push for real debt reduction, and especially if you try to force concessions from the largest banks, we will not take it kindly. The Treasury has been vague about what the retaliation might be, but less favorable trade status and less generosity from world lending institutions are among the likely candidates.

Thus did Secretary of State James Baker personally derail the Brazilian negotiations in the fall of 1987, back when he was treasury secretary, by warning Brazil's finance minister that his proposal for submarket interest rates was a "non-starter." Of course, no one knew until recently one possible reason for Baker's intense support of the banks: his holdings in Chemical Bank, which had more than half of its shareholder equity lent to Brazil alone.

The Treasury has also helped the big banks pass much of the bill to the taxpayer, by supporting their lobbying for increased lending from the IMF and the World Bank. Loans to developing nations from those institutions have traditionally supported economic stabilization and economic development. Under the influence of Baker and the big banks, though, they are devoted increasingly to helping the debtor countries pay the interest on their bank debts. This amounts to a money laundering opera-

tion in which taxpayer dollars are diverted to the commercial banks via world lending institutions and Latin America. Maybe all this helps explain why Baker, not generally a big fan of multilateral aid, was an avid supporter of the \$14 billion of new lending authority given by the United States to the World Bank last year.

The big banks support this lobbying with a steady stream of publicity to convince the public of their good intentions. They tirelessly tell us about the "new money" they're making available to debtors, even though out of the 40 or so debtor countries, exactly one signed a "new money" agreement that was actually put in operation last year. That was Brazil, and we've seen what became of its new money.

NOTWITHSTANDING the p.r. virtuosity of the big banks, the past year has seen growing political support for debt relief that would actually do what the term implies. Faced with this threat, the banks have upgraded their rhetoric, while holding firm to their basic strategy. They have lately become champions of "voluntary debt reduction," in which an individual bank can choose to give up part of its claim on the debtor country in return for a safer asset. For example, last year the banks were given the option of trading their claims on Mexico for a new Mexican "exit bond" that had a smaller principal than the original loan, but came with (among other things) collateral that the bank could seize in the event of default. There were a few takers, and Mexico reduced its debt, but only marginally.

One reason the relief was only slight is that voluntary debt reduction suffers from a basic problem—the general problem of trying to negotiate debt relief without the equivalent of a bankruptcy judge. If individual banks actually granted enough voluntary debt reduction to restore Mexico's creditworthiness, the remaining Mexican debt would rise sharply in value (it now sells for 37 percent of face value), as repayment prospects improved. But knowing this, each individual bank is inclined to hold on to its Mexican debt, waiting for the other banks to provide relief. In the end, little real debt reduction will occur unless all banks are somehow compelled—either through mutual agreement or by an external authority such as the IMF—to share the cost.

From the big bankers' point of view, of course, voluntary debt relief is a smashing success. It helps them look earnest and conscientious, a perception that comes in handy when they're trying to lobby for taxpayer contributions to the World Bank and IMF. Also, the big banks can reap monetary benefits if smaller banks can be tempted into giving up their claims on a developing nation and thereby raising the value of remaining claims. And the smaller banks, which tend to have less equity tied up in these loans, are often willing to cave in and take a loss, just to clear their books of the mess once and for all. Citicorp chairman John Reed was recently quite candid on this point: "... Some smaller banks that have very different interests [from ours] are selling out at

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prices that, frankly, are quite convenient to those of us who are going to stay in for the long haul."

This enthusiastic championing of debt reduction—so long as it's done by others—has become the standard pose of big banks. Last year Bolivia arranged a "buyback" in which it repurchased its debts at a discount from any bank willing to sell. Bank of America played a large role in negotiating the arrangement, and praised it in testimony before Congress. But when the time came for the actual buyback, Bank of America refused to sell Bolivia more than 16 percent of the debt it held, keeping Bolivia in hock on the rest. Citicorp also praised the deal in Congress while refusing to sell most of its claims on Bolivia.

Another part of the game plan for the largest banks, particularly those with a network of branch banks in Latin America, is to press hard for more "debt-equity swaps," which are fast becoming the banks' favorite kind of voluntary debt reduction. These have been widely touted as a partial solution to the debt crisis, even though they have proved disastrous in most countries that try them. In a debt-equity swap, the bank typically sells its debt to another firm, which in turn sells it to the central bank of the debtor country. The central bank may buy the debt at a modest discount, or even at face value, despite the fact that the debt trades at a deep discount in New York and was bought cheaply by the intermediary firm. That firm then uses the proceeds to invest in the local economy.

The debtor country typically loses big. The central bank does not usually have enough cash on hand for the deal. (After all, it didn't have the money to pay the interest, so how can it suddenly retire the principal?) Therefore, the central bank must print money, or float new internal debt. The upshot is that debt-equity swaps typically fuel inflation, or sharply raise domestic interest rates, or both.

So why do the debtor nations sign on to these deals? Sadly, some local officials consent to the swaps in exchange for a kickback or in response to more subtle pressures from local firms that benefit from them. Also, debt-equity swaps are often foisted on debtor nations by big banks as a precondition for restructuring agreements. This was painfully true in the case of Brazil, where Citicorp relentlessly insisted on a swap program—the last thing a country on the verge of hyperinflation needed. Brazil was committed to repurchase \$1.8 billion of its debt at face value, despite the fact that the debt was selling in the New York market at less than 40 cents on the dollar. Of course, in agreeing to the swap, Brazil raised the debt's value in New York markets, which was exactly what Citicorp had in mind.

FROM THE point of view of U.S. foreign policy, the most pressing need for debt reduction is in Mexico, which is currently negotiating a new restructuring agreement. There is no doubt that debt reduction would help keep the Mexican government viable. Nor is there doubt that the government has undertaken heroic economic re-

forms. The country deserves and needs to have the interest rate on its debt cut to four or five percent, from the current 11 percent.

Could Mexico's creditor banks be convinced to agree to such a cut? Almost certainly, if there was adequate support from the U.S. Treasury, finance ministries in other creditor countries, and the IMF. The first step would be a clear signal that the U.S. government wants real relief, and that the Treasury will not pressure Mexico to keep paying 11 percent interest. The United States could also make clear that it will continue to support lending by the IMF and the World Bank, but will not press Mexico into using those funds to pay market interest rates to banks. The Treasury has many other carrots and sticks at its disposal. And the IMF and World Bank could encourage debt reduction by guaranteeing the reduced interest payments.

Japan has already signaled its willingness to help finance those guarantees, not only for Mexico, but for other debtors as well. But so far the Treasury has pushed away Japan's offer, partly out of fear of surrendering IMF voting power to Japan, and partly, it seems, to keep American banks from getting cornered into actual debt relief. Once again the Treasury has proved more attentive to the interests of large banks than to those of taxpayers or U.S. foreign policy.

GRANTED, in theory, the taxpayers *could* foot the entire bill for genuine and lasting debt relief. And they assuredly will keep footing some of the bill, whatever happens. But banks deserve to shoulder a large share of the burden in both a moral and practical sense. It was they, and not the taxpayers, who made the bad loans. (Their claims that they did so under government pressure just don't wash.) And accepting the consequences for bad loans of the past is supposedly what discourages bad loans in the future. Of course, the same can be said for debtors; and you can rest assured that, even in the best of cases, the developing nations will live with collapsed living standards for years to come as a result of their overly aggressive borrowing.

Under the current Treasury, which so far looks disturbingly like the Baker Treasury, the banks are not likely to pay their fair share anytime soon. Instead, we will be told that no bank should be "pressured" into anything. And we will be told once again that the problem is very complicated, requiring new IMF and World Bank inflows into Mexico, co-financing arrangements with third countries, a "new money" package from the banks, contingency clauses, and a menu of options for debt-equity swaps and exit bonds for the smaller banks. And so on.

Mexico, like Brazil before it, may knuckle under to the Treasury; its internal economic and political crisis—the very reason it urgently needs relief—robs the government of the vigor to challenge the Treasury's position. But as in Brazil, we should expect the current policy to produce rising instability rather than renewed creditworthiness and growth. And you know who, in addition to Mexico's impoverished people, will pay in the end. □

Those killing fields are half empty, not half full.

SALVADOR'S SILVER LINING

BY MORTON M. KONDRACK

San Salvador

On Wednesday, February 15, one-time Communist guerrilla commander Miguel Castellanos sat in a room at the Camino Real hotel here and recounted—matter-of-factly, it seemed to me—how he had been targeted for assassination by various groups since his defection to the Salvadoran government in 1985. Some in the military and the far right, the stocky 40-year-old said, still considered him a Communist and were outraged that he and other defectors were allowed to take places in Salvadoran society—in his case, as a prominent political commentator—without being punished for their previous activities. His former comrades in the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front had marked him for death, he said, “for obvious reasons”—for defecting and for making a living by exposing the FMLN’s tactics in speeches, articles, and TV debates with leftist politicians.

Castellanos said he had quit the guerrillas because, with the elections of 1982 and 1984, “El Salvador was not a dictatorship any more,” because “the Communists want a dictatorship, not the betterment of the people,” because he believed in popular democratic political participation, and because he had been distressed at the 1983 murder and suicide of two FMLN leaders in Nicaragua in an ideological dispute.

Castellanos said that things have not been going well for the FMLN. Their front groups have not been able to put large crowds into the streets, and their fighters have had to resort to car bombings and the assassination of mayors and other local officials. “Terrorism is a sign of military weakness,” he said. As a result, they have come up with a clever new ploy, proposing a “peace plan” that would require abrogating the Salvadoran Constitution and postponing presidential elections scheduled for March 19 until September. The army has served notice it will stage a coup if the constitution is violated, and the only way to postpone elections legally is for the right-wing National Assembly to name a temporary president. “The guerrillas know the plan will be rejected,” Castellanos said. “They will use the rejection to justify insurrection. . . . They will incite violence during the election in hopes of producing repression. They will try to provoke the security forces to take actions that will result in a cutoff of [U.S.] military aid. That could restore the advantage to the FMLN.”

On the basis of interviews with politicians on the left, right, and center, with leaders of the FMLN’s labor front, with top military officers, democratic trade unionists, and foreign diplomats, Castellanos’s analysis seems right

on the mark. But no more will be heard from him. About 24 hours after I saw him, his car was stopped by FMLN guerrillas driving a yellow pickup truck, who then pumped dozens of machine-gun bullets into his body. The FMLN’s Radio Venceremos asserted that his murder was “revolutionary justice.”

This killing is the latest event in what everyone here regards as an upsurge in political violence over the past year. Tutela Legal, the Roman Catholic Church’s left-leaning human rights group, accuses the army and security forces and right-wing death squads of killing 145 civilians during the first 11 months of 1988, compared with 101 during the same period in 1987, while 41 were killed by guerrillas, compared with 30 in 1987. The government’s human rights office thinks that political killings may have doubled from 1987 to 1988, and it attributes most of the increase (as does the U.S. Embassy) to stepped-up activity by the FMLN.

What’s most important for the future is how this violence and the FMLN peace offer are interpreted in the United States, whose financial support is crucial for the Salvadoran government. It’s become the fashion in the American press to regard the violence as one of several signs that U.S. policy here has failed. On February 2, for example, ABC’s John Quinones reported that “eight years and \$3 billion after the U.S. first promised peace and democracy for El Salvador, the leftist rebels appear stronger than ever. . . . El Salvador’s moderate political forces have collapsed. . . . The right-wing ARENA party now controls the legislature, and their candidate is expected to win next month’s presidential elections. That would signal an even harder line against the guerrillas . . . more fighting. Meanwhile, El Salvador’s economy is mired in an ever deepening crisis.”

ABC topped off its report by featuring an old lady in a market saying, “There’s no peace or democracy here. Things get worse every day. American money comes in, but it’s only for guns to be used against our own people.” According to a similarly gloomy forecast in the *New York Times Magazine* on February 5 by veteran correspondent James LeMoyne, “El Salvador may already have become the Northern Ireland of Central America: a permanent running sore, congenitally incapable of fully healing or being cured, short of the most radical measures,” such as a U.S.-imposed settlement or a U.S. withdrawal “that would leave the Salvadorans to fight it out among themselves.”

The pessimism rampant in the press plays nicely, if

unintentionally, into the plans of the left to get Congress to slash or cut off U.S. military aid (which, contrary to the opinion of ABC's old lady, amounts to less than one-third of economic assistance) and force the government into negotiations with the FMLN. The guerrilla front, conveniently, has just taken steps to make itself more palatable to policy-makers and the American public. Not only has the FMLN promised to respect the results of elections if they are held six months from now, but top guerrilla commander Joaquín Villalobos wrote an article in the current issue of *Foreign Policy* declaring that the FMLN now believes in "democratic revolution." While still Marxist-Leninist intellectually, Villalobos claimed, the FMLN has concluded that "it is neither possible nor necessary to carry out a plan to eliminate totally the private sector, to establish a single-party system, to bar other parties from the media, to break with the Church, [or] to eliminate elections." The FMLN does reserve the right, however, to keep its weapons even after elections, until the Salvadoran army is reorganized to its liking.

PESSIMISTS are correct in saying that Salvador has dire troubles and could—by any one of several scenarios—collapse into repression and chaos. The likeliest, as envisioned by Castellanos and other analysts, is that ARENA would win the presidential election, the Communists would launch attacks to provoke the military into reprisals, ARENA's extremist element would launch renewed death squad atrocities, Congress would cut off U.S. aid, the army would then stage a coup and return to its "dirty war" tactics of the early 1980s, and this would increase popular support for the FMLN and lead eventually to a Communist victory.

On the other hand, there is good reason for Americans to think that U.S. policy has achieved important results in this violent, poverty-ridden, once-feudal country, and for us to persevere in trying to foster democracy, economic development, respect for human rights, military professionalism, and a negotiated settlement on the government's terms, not the Communists'.

After centuries of dictatorship, peasant massacres, rigged elections, and torture, El Salvador has held five reasonably fair and democratic elections during the past eight years. It has a constitution calling for President José Napoleón Duarte to transfer power to an elected successor on June 1, and Duarte, who is dying of liver cancer, is determined to do so. FMLN sympathizers are running for office and openly participating in public debates, even as they call for the vote to be postponed. Like Castellanos, Duarte regards the FMLN's proposal as "a trick to disrupt the institutionality of the country."

Notwithstanding last year's disturbing numbers, over the long haul of the past eight years there has been a dramatic reduction in the rate of political killing. The average was 20 per month in 1988 (up from ten in early 1987)—not a pleasant number, but far below the carnage level of 800 per month in the early 1980s. It's true that 70,000 people have been killed in the past ten years

(many times the number in Northern Ireland, though half the toll in Lebanon). It's true that army troops still commit atrocities, such as the execution of ten peasants in the village of San Sebastian last September. And it's true that no military officer has ever been jailed for killing a civilian.

But it's also true that at least the top level of the Salvadoran army has become convinced through U.S. pressure that defeating the Communists requires respect for civilian rights. In late January, Defense Minister Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova had to spend more than six hours on his feet arguing this point in a tense meeting with top air force officers fed up with American-imposed restrictions. The next week, Vice President Dan Quayle came to town to renew the pressure on behalf of the Bush administration. He told the army, ARENA, and the judiciary that American support depended on sustained human rights improvements, starting with prosecutions in the San Sebastian case.

While both the government and the left have been killing peasants believed to be cooperating with the other side, the FMLN has far exceeded the right in killing prominent figures. In fact, not a single major leftist politician, student leader, or labor official has been murdered during the past year, while the FMLN has claimed credit for assassinating nine mayors and one governor, and for driving 80 other mayors from office. Vides Casanova says his worst fear is that the FMLN will murder a prominent left-wing politician such as Guillermo Manuel Ungo or Rubén Zamora and try to blame it on the right or on the government. The FMLN is believed responsible for the death of one prominent human rights worker and has been accused by Tutela Legal of committing a rural massacre while wearing army uniforms.

PESSIMISTS ARE right when they note that despite U.S. aid, the Salvadoran economy is stagnant and that some social indicators, such as availability of clean water, are declining. From 1979 to 1983, economic output in El Salvador fell by 28 percent. Without U.S. aid it would have continued to plunge. Over the past ten years, it's estimated that FMLN guerrillas—"the G's," as they're called by the press—have done \$1.8 billion worth of damage to Salvador's infrastructure. The devastating earthquake of 1986 did another \$1 billion worth. U.S. economic aid, totaling \$2 billion over the past decade, has not even covered these losses. Bad as conditions are here, though, El Salvador gives the impression of far more construction, traffic, and overall economic liveliness than desolate Nicaragua.

Part of the blame for El Salvador's economic stagnation rests with Duarte, who for all his democratic heroics has not been a good economic manager. A Christian Democrat with a socialist outlook, he has been hostile to private business—confusing potential entrepreneurs with old-style oligarchs—and has favored collectivized land reform, nationalized banks and export industries, as well as an overvalued currency, all of which has discouraged

investment and created opportunities for corruption. Both leading contenders to succeed Duarte—Christian Democrat Fidel Chavez Mena and ARENA nominee Alfredo Cristiani—favor free market economics. ARENA is accused of planning to reverse land reform entirely, dispossess the peasantry, and restore the oligarchs to their vast holdings, but Cristiani denies this, claiming he would decollectivize large farms and give peasants individual title to the land.

THE BIGGEST unanswerable question in El Salvador at the moment is what ARENA really will do if Cristiani wins. American journalists, Christian Democrats, and left-wingers of the Democratic Convergence (the third force in the upcoming elections) all contend that ARENA is controlled not by conservative democrats such as businessman Cristiani, but by right-wing extremists led by former army major Roberto d'Aubuisson. The party's macho 1984 presidential nominee and its leader in the National Assembly, d'Aubuisson is widely believed (by top officials of the U.S. government, among others) to have organized death squad violence in the early 1980s, including the 1980 assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Penetrating ARENA reportedly is a top priority of U.S. intelligence here, but it is said to be more difficult than penetrating the FMLN. Relations between ARENA and the United States have not been good. Even moderate ARENA politicians, such as San Salvador Mayor Armando Calderon Sol, are furious with the United States for using its money and influence to defeat d'Aubuisson and elect Duarte in 1984 and for supporting Duarte's economic policies since then. They also accuse former U.S. Ambassador Edwin Corr, correctly, of favoring Chavez Mena over Cristiani. They acknowledge this has changed under the current ambassador, William Walker. Quayle pledged U.S. neutrality in this year's elections, but informed ARENA that it was "in a suspect category" and would be watched closely for signs of renewed death squad activity, in case it won the election.

At the moment, most polls and political guesstimates suggest an ARENA victory. The Democratic Convergence presidential candidate, Guillermo Ungo, admits that polls conducted for the left by an American firm show it would draw somewhere between seven percent and 17 percent if the election were held now, and that ARENA would get 36 percent and the Christian Democrats, 28 percent. The Convergence, which is politically allied with the FMLN but condemns some of its violence, claims it could finish second behind ARENA if the elections were postponed until September, thanks to a "hidden preference" for the left among the urban poor and the rural peasantry. Practically no one else here credits this estimate, however. Despite the desperate poverty of the countryside, it constitutes ARENA's base because of the traditional conservatism of the peasantry. The Christian Democrats' base is with workers and government employees in San Salvador.

ARENA seems to be ahead because of the economic failures of the Duarte regime, superior ARENA campaign orga-

nizing, and weak campaigning so far by Chavez Mena. The Christian Democrats have tried to discredit Cristiani with the slogan "Freddy Can't" (as in "can't" handle Roberto d'Aubuisson) and to unveil new evidence about d'Aubuisson's role in the Romero assassination. But Chavez Mena has been unable to decide whether he wants to distance himself from Duarte or to claim credit for his experience as Duarte's planning minister. One hope for Chavez Mena is that he can convince voters that he is more capable than ARENA of negotiating peace with the FMLN.

One source of worry is that ARENA might purge the current moderate top leadership of the armed forces and install a hard-liner such as air force chief Juan Rafael Bustillo as defense minister. Bustillo, Vides Casanova's leading challenger in his six-hour confrontation with air force officers, is believed to favor unrestricted bombing as a means of fighting the guerrillas. The army has served notice that it will not support such a policy (tried before and found counterproductive). It has further served notice that it would not accept the appointment of Roberto d'Aubuisson or Sigifrido Ochoa Perez, another hard-liner, as defense minister. As elsewhere in Latin America, army respect for civilian authority has its limits in El Salvador. Vides Casanova and army chief of staff René Emilio Ponce have practically promised that there will be a coup if the political parties agreed to postpone the elections in an unconstitutional manner. That may be just what the FMLN is hoping for.

There is one final danger facing Salvador—that the loser of the presidential election will claim fraud and refuse to accept the result. Christian Democrats contend that ARENA officials have prevented 350,000 voters from receiving registration cards. ARENA spokesmen say they are so convinced of victory that only fraud could keep them from winning. Vides Casanova says his job is to hold the army together to keep order in the event of violence. He says this means he will move against right-wing death squads if they reappear in force.

THE LAST THING this problem-ridden country needs is for the support of the United States to be in doubt. If the worst were to happen, and massive repression resumed, the United States presumably would want to cut off military aid regardless of the consequences. Quayle delivered a message to that effect. Short of that, however, the United States should be patient, even if ARENA wins. We should encourage free market economic reforms, and if budgets will not permit more economic aid, then we should at least pass legislation to give temporary legal status to Salvadoran immigrants in the United States, whose remittances back home are a major source of income to the country. We should not force Salvador to postpone its elections, but urge negotiations to let the FMLN into the political process if it's really willing to abandon warfare, doubtful though that prospect is. Above all, we shouldn't give in to pessimism and give up hope for democracy in El Salvador. It's a hard case, but we've made a good beginning. □

BOOKS AND THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Leftovers

A specter is haunting much of the Western world—the postrevolutionary who never had a revolution. Through the 1960s and early 1970s many young people in Europe and the Americas, sickened by the ills of the society around them, believed that radical change must be at hand. That change didn't occur, and they have been left stranded. It's not a ques-

High Hopes
(Skouros)

tion of hope deferred, the revolution postponed: hope for the revolution has dimmed. They are embittered veterans of a war that was never really fought and does not loom.

Further, those now middling-aged people are sometimes joined by younger ones who were children or were unborn in the "revolutionary" days but, equally sickened with much of what they see around them, fall in with the veterans' brigade. The younger ones are disinherited without even having had the chance of a legacy.

Film has been dealing with the post-revolutionary for at least 15 years. The first instance I remember is Blier's *Going Places*, the 1974 French film in which two young men vented their frustrated revolutionary zeal in social anarchism. The latest is the English film *High Hopes*, written and directed by Mike Leigh, who has been especially active in theater and TV. His principal characters are two lovers, Cyril and Shirley. Cyril, bearded and wise and 35, is a motorcycle messenger in London though he's obviously capable of much more demanding work. A radical, he wants only to keep himself as aloof as he can from the Thatcherite nation around him, to make a living with minimum commitment to a world he despises. Shirley, who is about his age and shares his life, holds the same views but is less adamant about non-participation: she wants a child. Cyril doesn't.

Around this pair, whom Leigh treats with affection and discernment, are rela-

tives, a few neighbors, a friend. Each of them is somehow related to the central theme of postrevolution; in fact, the film's chief flaw is that those relations are sometimes overstressed.

Cyril's mother is a working-class woman, now bent and senile, who forgets things in the present and who presumably symbolizes the working class's amnesia about its past and future. Cyril's sister is a feverishly acquisitive bourgeoisie, and her husband, a rising hamburger king, is more smugly acquisitive. Ma's posh neighbors, a wine merchant and wife who have renovated an old house in a run-down street, are feverish in their own way, striving to replicate what they perceive to be high style in manners and behavior.

Except for Ma, Leigh dislikes these other characters—somewhat too obviously. From time to time they leave life to become cartoons. But what saves the film then and what strengthens it throughout is its form. Leigh rejects traditional narrative structure in favor of an exploratory, almost casual method that moves in spurts of interest. Since, by and large, we share those interests, we follow the film through an aggregate of social moments, more than dramatic scenes. The intelligent daring of this method reassures us when the content gets overly broad: we're more patient than we might be otherwise.

The film begins—we discover—untraditionally. A young bumpkin, laden with bags, arrives in London and tries to find his sister's flat. Lost, he asks help of a man he happens to pass, a man repairing his motorcycle. The cyclist is touched by his helplessness and asks him in for tea. Up to this point the film seems to be the bumpkin's story; but the cyclist is Cyril, and his companion who makes the tea is Shirley. Although the bumpkin stays the night—two nights—he finally passes out of the story and leaves us with its true center. This deliberate tease of tradition, deceiving us about the protagonist, shoehorning in

the film's real concerns, is witty—and it's helpful. The simplicity and openness of Cyril and Shirley are established before they come center stage.

So, bolstered by Leigh's audacity, we can tolerate the laid-on uppishness of Ma's neighbors, the giggling consumeritis of Cyril's sister. And Leigh's symbolic gestures often pay off. Cyril and Shirley visit Marx's grave in Highgate and read the inscription telling us that philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it. When they leave, they run into a friend of theirs, a radical woman who invites them in for tea. Obviously strung out on some drug, the woman rattles on about revolutionary meetings she attends and how she enjoys the talk—not much action, just talk. Cyril and Shirley have just come from Marx's grave, literally and in some other ways, and here they are with a woman who is high on two stimulants, one of which is Marxian talk.

Rather than a cumulative traditional structure, Leigh uses a few organizing principles around which his inquiries cluster: a sequence in which Ma forgetfully locks herself out of her house and asks her posh neighbors for help; a visit

FILMS WORTH SEEING

I'm Gonna Git You Sucka. Latest in a new genre—the satire by blacks of black stereotypes. Less than deft filmmaking but a fair number of witty spoofs. (Reviewed 3/6/89)

Lawrence of Arabia. Restored and re-recorded. So splendid that it exists independently of historical data as many classic historical plays do. The screenplay falters slightly in Part Two, but the filmmaking is always superb. (2/20/89)

Pelle the Conqueror. Max von Sydow is excellent as a Swedish farmhand in Denmark, c. 1890, rearing his son to outgrow him. The contours and courses of an old-fashioned novel (which it was). (1/23/89)

True Believer. A New York civil rights lawyer, burned out, recovers his spirit in a drive to free a wrongly imprisoned man. A murder mystery and a legal tangle, some sharp dialogue and some good twists. (2/13/89)

SK

to each of the three principal couples at bedtime; a surprise 70th birthday party for Ma. The smell of each of the homes we enter is in our nostrils; Leigh knows them past the details of decor. The best scenes, the pivotal scenes really, are long ones between Cyril and Shirley, private, warm, funny, basically grim. (Leigh believes in improvisation, but how much of these and other scenes were improvised it's impossible to tell.)

All the actors are good, though Heather Tobias, as Cyril's sister, has a near-impossible job. Her giggling frenzies are based on some observations of Leigh's or hers that simply don't resolve into a character, even a satirical one. Philip Davis is exactly right as Cyril, appealing without any hint of trying for it, a quiet human being resigned to mere cheerfulness. Edna Dore is granitic as old Ma, lost but unafraid. Leigh uses her face tellingly in close-ups while people buzz around her.

An epitome of the film is the casting of Shirley. Ruth Sheen's upper front teeth protrude like a small amphitheater. That is plain fact. When we first see her, so sorry is our conditioning in stereotypes, we assume she must be a figure of fun, some sort of simp. But quickly it becomes clear that she is a serious, major character, one of a pair of lovers, and quite soon, particularly because of the tender scenes between her and Davis, her face becomes the only face for the gentle and humane woman she is. Leigh's choice of Sheen is typical of his approach to narrative and to filmmaking. He wants to jolt our preconceptions.

How does *High Hopes* end? Pretty much as it began. No climax, no substantive change, no extricable point. We have simply journeyed along the way in some people's lives. Cyril and Shirley are merely keeping on, trying to live decently even if resignedly, even if the title of their film is now only wry.

EDWARD ROTHSTEIN ON MUSIC

Strictures at an Institution

Anyone who attends concerts with any regularity has undoubtedly come across something we might call an "Institutional Performance." An Institutional Performance is a musical performance that an institution mounts in order to honor itself. They were once quite rare, restricted to special events staged on special occasions. But in recent years they have proliferated as our musical institutions—Philharmonic societies and opera companies and concert halls—reach an age where centennials and milestones are commonplace.

The point in an Institutional Performance, of course, is never the music itself, but the way the music reflects on its host and patrons. So the repertory in an Institutional Performance must come from the same era in which the institution itself evolved—that is, the 19th century (give or take a decade or so on either side). The music cannot be intimate or small-scaled, though, for that would give the wrong impression of the history and the significance of the institution. Instead it must be a display of force and grandeur. It should also reveal the institution to be caring

and soulful, which explains the use of, say, Mahler's Second Symphony on such occasions.

Another approach to mounting an Institutional Performance—which suits the miscellaneous aesthetic now at work in musical life—is to present a "collection." Such a collection involves countless "great" performers parading across the institution's stage. These presentations accomplish just what the institution wants; the attention is never drawn to the music itself, but always to who's coming next and who performed best. The emphasis is on the institution's power of patronage.

These are always "gala" events and are often broadcast on television, but I have never seen or heard one yet that wasn't depressing. The highlight of the centennial celebration for the Met a few years ago was, curiously enough, the performance of two hit songs by Lionel Richie—leaving the high bowing on its knees to the low. One of the most discouraging of gala Institutional Performances took place on the unveiling of the renovation of Carnegie Hall; the renovation itself was an institutional

GIVE ME LIBERTY OR GIVE ME DEBT

Our skyrocketing National Debt and high real interest rates are threatening us with economic decline. Consider these facts:

1. From 1980 to 1988, 80% of the \$1.69 trillion increase in the National Debt was interest on that Debt. In 1988, the \$151 billion of net interest on this Debt was 98% of the entire Federal budget deficit of \$155 billion.

2. The real interest on the prime (prime rate minus inflation rate) jumped from an average of 1.6% between 1960 and 1980, all the way to 7% between 1981 and the present.

3. The growth rate of personal interest income surpassed that of wage and salary income, between 1979 and 1988. In 1988, this imbalance in the growth rate added an extra \$69 billion to personal interest income.

4. The present Japanese prime rate is 3.38%, the German prime is 6.5%, and our prime is 11%. Almost 20% of the 1988 trade deficit of \$135 billion was \$25 billion of interest on the National Debt paid to foreigners.

The Congress should urgently consider the following remedial steps before it is too late:

- The creative use of pension funds against which the government could borrow to refinance the National Debt (starting with refinancing the \$325 billion of National Debt owned by foreigners), and thereby reduce the budget deficit by \$470 billion over ten years.
- A 'windfall profits' tax on personal interest income to be paid by taxpayers whose gross yearly income from all sources exceeds \$100,000.

In 1989, we must draft America's financial resources, not her citizens. In the 3rd World War raging around us the weapons are currency exchange rates and prime interest rates. Patriotism is the critical ingredient needed to reassert our financial strength and ensure long-term prosperity.

For further information on these issues, write to David Krebs, President, Uncommon Sense, 230 Park Avenue, Suite 954, New York, New York 10017.

name _____
address _____
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assertion of power and pride that may have permanently destroyed the acoustics of one of the world's great concert halls.

So successful, though, have these events become that gradually the Institutional Performance, like some fast-multiplying parasite, is appearing throughout ordinary concert life. There is no longer any need for a special occasion to mount one. They can be found nearly every night of the week in almost any concert hall or opera house. The extravagant productions of Zeffirelli have found such favor at New York's Metropolitan Opera—at least until the budget crunch was on—because they permit splendid Institutional Performances on ordinary subscription series. The mere rise of the curtain on the opulent collection of objects and cast members is cause for gasps and applause, as if some door were opened by Monty Hall on "Let's Make a Deal."

But even the style of an ordinary performance can be institutional, correct and overtly impressive, without risk or imagination. The music becomes simply an appendage to some other object—the musician's career, a subscription series, a recording project. The accepted international style for performance, in fact, is the institutional style. Compare nearly any recording made during the last five years by a major record company of a major repertory piece with any recording made five decades ago of the same piece, and you can hear the difference between individual style and institutional style, between music as personal meditation and music as public production. To a certain extent, even our repertory has become an institution of sorts.

ATENTION IS now beginning to focus on what lies behind all these Institutional Performances, namely, the performance of the institutions themselves. In New York, within the space of a few months, it was announced that the leadership of each of the three major musical institutions in Lincoln Center was going to change. First, Beverly Sills is stepping down as general director of the New York City Opera, having put the company on a firm financial footing if not a glorious aesthetic one. Her replacement is to be Christopher Keene, whose workmanlike conducting in the past does not provide encouragement for the future. Then Bruce Crawford—the general manager of the Metropolitan

Opera, the man who brought this nation's premiere opera company out of the red, and who brought the artistic direction of James Levine under the sway of the Met's business department—resigned to become president of the nation's largest advertising firm, leaving behind him a vacuum that only a similarly equipped CEO can fill. Finally, Zubin Mehta, the music director of the New York Philharmonic, announced that he would not be returning after the 1990-91 season. That will make him the Philharmonic conductor with the longest tenure on record—and one of the least distinguished. Mehta's successor is yet to be chosen, though lists of eligible candidates are being avidly drawn up.

There is much, no doubt, that is promising in all these developments. Unpredictability is a virtue when predictability has become a vice. But the likelihood is that the predictability of repertory and performance will continue, partly because the musical culture as a whole has long since settled into regularity, but primarily because in each of these cases, the individual has been successful in serving the interests of the institutions themselves.

BEFORE Beverly Sills, the City Opera was provincial and second rate and broke. Now it has become a sort of post-modern pop opera house, packaging opera as if it were Broadway and Broadway as if it were opera, while tapping into some of the aura of the pop "avant-garde" with operas by Philip Glass (*Akhmaten*) and Anthony Davis (*X*). The viewer could count on competent versions of classic operas with moderately accomplished conducting and direction, but the main energy has come from staging the likes of *Brigadoon*. Before Crawford, the Met was becoming fiscally pale with deficits of almost \$8 million; now cheeks are rosy, a mini-Met for chamber opera has been announced at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and all the administrative wheels are well greased. Before Mehta, the middle-of-the-road Philharmonic listener had been driven out of the halls by the cool smarts of Pierre Boulez. Now subscriptions are said to be fairly steady, and several orchestral grand tours have been taken to all regions of the globe.

Each institution, that is, has succeeded in becoming more institutionally secure through the labors of these leaders. But in none of these cases has artistic achievement been distinguished. Of

course there were bright spots, along with occasional forays into new repertory. But apart from the exceptions—required for press attention and status if not conviction—artistic issues have fairly consistently been put aside in the service of business concerns.

THE CASE of the Philharmonic is particularly instructive, in part because a change in that position is likely to have the most direct effect on performance itself. The Philharmonic has not led a charmed life in its 147 seasons. During the last century it was under attack for its neglect of American music, a refrain still heard today. At the turn of this century, when the Philharmonic's economic future was guaranteed by a panel of patrons, the goal was "to reconcile the commercially possible with the artistically desirable," a goal still unreached. And nearly every change of the conductorial guard in this century has been marked by debate and controversy. In 60 years there were more than 11 music directors—not a way to build a great orchestra or a coherent musical tradition. (Compare New York's experience with the concentration that Koussevitzky brought to Boston over 25 seasons, followed by Charles Munch for another 13 seasons.)

But even given the conflict that marks the history of this orchestra, something has obviously changed in recent years. Mahler, when he led the Philharmonic during the first decade of this century, was far from universally loved, but he wanted the orchestra to be "the best in the country and the equal of any in the world." And by all accounts he marked a transition in its status. Toscanini was blamed in the early 1930s for all sorts of limitations, but there was little doubt that he left the organization more musically sophisticated than he found it. Virgil Thomson thought that Artur Rodzinsky did far more during his brief reign, turning the Philharmonic into the "equal of the Boston and Philadelphia orchestras and possibly their superior."

So the complaints of an earlier era must be put in perspective. It is hard today to feel too much sympathy for those who regretted that the main choices for music director in 1949 were Stokowski and Mitropoulos, that during the mid-'50s there was too much conducting by George Szell, Bruno Walter, and Guido Cantelli. The one thing that everyone can now agree on—even those who

scorned his conducting style at the time—is that a golden era was inaugurated by Leonard Bernstein in the late '50s. He turned the position of music director into the single most important post in American musical life, by devoting himself to American music, by approaching his audiences as an engaged and engaging pedagogue, by planning intriguing programs, and by making use of the electronic media to spread his message. There is probably not a single music listener today over the age of 30 who was not deeply affected by Bernstein's presence on television and radio and in concert.

It even makes some sense that, after Bernstein, the Philharmonic gambled on the avant-garde tastes and energies of Pierre Boulez. Flush with the energies of the Bernstein years, and with the royalties from Bernstein's 200 or so recordings (they were selling 400,000 copies a year by 1969), the Philharmonic properly felt it could take a chance. Boulez's appointment may have been inspired by the aggressive antinomian aesthetic of the late '60s—Boulez was outspokenly "avant-garde"—but in practice he turned out to be an extraordinarily serious musician, whose ear and taste had substantial influence on a significant minority of listeners. Boulez treated some of the mainstream repertory with scorn, dryly running through the Romantic symphonies that are the main fare of Philharmonic societies. But in structurally intricate and intellectually concentrated works by Beethoven or Wagner, he was as revelatory as he was with 20th-century repertory, cleansing scores of mannerism and indulgence, leaving them transparent and refined.

IT IS difficult to imagine what will be remembered from the Mehta years. In 1983 I wrote a report for the *New York Times* about extensive discontent within the orchestra itself about Mehta's musicianship and achievement, about his economic failure as a recording artist (Mehta's recordings essentially have no market), and about the critical consensus that had become clear: Mehta's tenure had been a failure. Despite changes in personnel and in orchestral management, the orchestra's tone was strained, dynamics were uncontrolled, phrasing perfunctory. Apart from some performances of Bruckner and Mahler, whose large-scale energies seemed to awaken a slumbering spirit, the music generally seemed sodden and lifeless,

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missing a sense of line and balance and purpose. The criticisms were widespread. But Mehta's contract was extended through 1991: an institutional countermove, a public assertion of faith in Mehta's powers. Institutional authority was re-established, regardless of the consequences for the music itself. So some skepticism that there are any massive transformations planned in New York is certainly in order.

OUR MAJOR musical organizations came into existence during the 19th century, along with the repertory that still forms the core of their circulatory systems. As these organizations have become institutions in this century, their relationship to the art has changed, possibly permanently. During the first 60 years of its life, between 40 percent and 60 percent of the New York Philharmonic repertory was by living composers; that figure is now generally under 20 percent, with the other 80 percent receding fast into distant history. By my count, only two dozen compositions out of more than 120 in the current season are by living composers, with nearly half of those by Bernstein. Our musical institutions are still essentially 19th-century musical institutions; the only difference is that they tend to be larger, richer, and more insecure than their ancestors.

But let me try to be at least a little fair. It is difficult to lead a musical institution at this moment. The immense amounts of money needed to run any of these houses is given by government as well as private donors. Funding is generally based on how many people are being served and how often they return, not primarily on the basis of artistic adventure. This is an awkward system at best. It treats these institutions as if they were profit-making instruments of democratic taste. It certainly does not encourage refined decision-making. But it is also difficult to defend a style of idiosyncratic patronage: millions of dollars of public monies should not be expended so that just a few thousand people can occasionally sit in the Met indulging their eccentric preferences, no matter how artistically distinguished they might be.

So institutions are trapped into supporting themselves with large audiences. New compositions—even the most significant ones—really are of negligible importance to them; other organizations can serve that repertory. It would be foolish, for example, to expect the New York Philharmonic to begin playing Lu-

toslawski and Adams and Carter—composers who do appear occasionally on its current programs—with the same avidity with which it played the music of its contemporaries a century ago, Schumann and Liszt and Wagner and Brahms. The future of our institutions simply does not lie with the music of our time. The reasons for this cannot simply be audience rejection or compositional esotericism. Nineteenth-century repertory defines our institutional life because it satisfactorily serves the public function that music has taken on in our culture. Contemporary music has entirely different concerns. It is less involved in presenting grand mythic narratives or in speaking to a large undifferentiated public.

WHAT CAN an institution do except become a curator, find a sociological or aesthetic niche and exploit it? In New York some institutions have succeeded in doing just that. The Brooklyn Academy of Music has decided to serve a particular aesthetic—the one now called “avant-garde”—and it has done so with great élan. The 92nd Street Y also knows firmly what it is about: it presents world-class artists in its concert hall along with major dancers, poets, and artists; but it is an educational and community institution as much as an artistic one.

What is the mission of our other institutions? What, for example, can we hope for from the Metropolitan Opera? Surely not a vital contemporary operatic repertory: 50 years of the 19th century probably provide 90 percent of the repertory of all major opera houses in the world. The same repertory problems face the Met as the Philharmonic, leaving this season's presentation of Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* and Schoenberg's *Erwartung* as a token representative from a lost world. We might hope, perhaps, for a production of Schoenberg's *Moses and Aaron*, or Sessions's *Montezuma*, or Thomson's *Lord Byron*, but again, as with the Philharmonic, this is not where the Met will make its mark.

Moreover, the problems of international casting and voices are legion; they furnish the ultimate alibi for mediocrity. So we must hold out for more flights of imagination in traditional programming, more responsibly creative direction, more emphasis on ensemble values. The coming chamber opera theater of the Met offers some hope: once the bounds of grand opera are crossed, the possibilities for contemporary and Ba-

roque works multiply considerably.

Actually, though, the most we can hope for from the Met and the City Opera and the Philharmonic is robust routine. It is not likely that the Philharmonic, for example, will be able to find a musical director who will startle us into hearing the symphonic repertory anew. What conductor on even the short list of candidates for the job can possibly transform or sustain musical life on the basis of extraordinary interpretation? And what conductor can hope to have the sort of mandate, control, and tenure that will allow the creation of an astonishing musical instrument like Karajan's Berlin Philharmonic? Revelation and exploration and refinement are more properly the goals of smaller, more independent orchestras.

BUT IT IS not foolish to expect that the next conductor of the New York Philharmonic take a place in American musical life the way Bernstein did: as its single most significant spokesman and representative, who is articulate about the meanings of the great music of the past, about the issues that face musical life today, about the possibilities music holds for the future. During the '20s the Philharmonic officially began what it called an “educational policy.” Without slighting aesthetic goals, such a policy should again take a top priority. This does not mean producing more middle- and low-brow television broadcasts that are presented as “entertainment.” It does not mean programming down to wider audiences. It means the contrary: both narrowing sights and raising ambitions. The young people's concerts should move back into the center of our musical experience, not be some appendage to the regular season. The programming should have a point and a bite, with compositions scheduled to “talk to each other.” The compositions could share a theme—works inspired by *Faust*, for example; or they could be playfully allusive—works containing secret programs, such as those by Elgar and Berg; or they could be unusual demonstrations of national style—such as American symphonic music of Dvořák's “New World” vintage.

Of course, the next conductor should also be a showman, able to make convincing statements out of Beethoven's Fifth and Tchaikovsky's Sixth without succumbing to cliché. And the next conductor should be able to make use of television the way some of the European

conductors have, with video now becoming as important to home musical experience as radio once was. But we are already leaving behind the realm of plausibility. Is there such a visionary figure, and American to boot, let alone

three or four of them, to make New York a truly vital musical city? Such questions would be easier to answer if more were involved in the performance of institutions than the mere production of Institutional Performances.

had taken "no interest," he says, in the law and literature movement. Three years later we have *Law and Literature*, the first book, in Posner's words, "to attempt a general summary and evaluation of the field of law and literature, [and] to organize, augment, and redirect . . . scholarship in the field." Posner confesses, in his introduction, to a few lacunae—he does not discuss, for instance, the depiction of law in detective fiction—but as far as the major issues are concerned, his book certainly aims at completeness. *Law and Literature* is closely argued, makes extensive reference to literary and legal texts, and is accompanied by the staggering undertext of footnotes that law professors seem to favor no matter what the subject at hand.

Posner takes up in turn the topics of literature with legal themes, the interpretation of literary and legal texts, and the consideration of judicial opinions as literature. And he adds—as a kind of bonus, since the subject does not really fall within the traditional purview of law and literature scholarship—a section on "The Regulation of Literature by Law," which weighs the efficiency of defamation, obscenity, and copyright laws. It is an impressive effort from a full-time judge whose main academic interest lies in an area of legal scholarship that is not exactly overlapping.

All this research and thought is undoubtedly intended as a token of Posner's respect for the law and literature enterprise. But although he does not quite say so, the truth is that Posner does not buy a single one of what he takes to be the major premises of contemporary law and literature scholarship. When all has been said and done, he concedes only two areas in which a law and literature scholar might have some legitimate business to do: the stylistic analysis of judicial opinions as a way of understanding their effectiveness, and the evaluation of copyright, defamation, and obscenity laws in the light of a knowledge of the nature of literature. He also warmly endorses efforts to expose more lawyers, judges, and law professors to literature—particularly, as a way of broadening their cultural awareness, to literature that represents the legal practices of other times and places (continental law in Camus's *The Stranger*, for instance). The effect, in short, is to turn the law and literature movement squarely around and march it straight back in the direction of its origins.

The great weakness of academic inter-

OBJECTION OVERRULED

Law and Literature: A Misunderstood Relation

by Richard A. Posner

(Harvard University Press, 371 pp., \$25)

Can lawyers help us understand works of literature with legal themes? Can literature teach lawyers something about the nature of the law? Is literary theory helpful in interpreting statutory and constitutional texts? Is literary criticism useful for analyzing the style of judicial opinions? Richard Posner's answers to these questions are, respectively: no, not really, absolutely not, and about as useful as you would expect. These are good answers. On the other hand, the questions are not very good questions.

Law and literature is a recognized academic "movement"—although like, say, literature and philosophy, and unlike, say, law and economics, it has not moved in any particular direction until very recently. In surveys of the field, it is customary to identify two general categories of inquiry: "law in literature" and "law as literature." Work in the first category considers (obviously) literature that makes use of legal themes and situations (trial scenes, characters who are lawyers, reflections on crime and punishment, and so forth). Work in the second category regards legal texts from a literary critical point of view.

It is fair to say that until recently the great bulk of the writing produced under these heads has been extremely friendly, even to the point of obsequiousness, to both disciplines. The general sentiments have been that literature is a humanizing, consciousness-raising thing that most lawyers could profit by a good deal more exposure to; and, returning the compliment, that a well-written legal opinion is an admirable, self-consciously crafted thing that literary critics might fruitfully pay a little more respectful attention to.

About ten years ago, this rather genteel enterprise suddenly, in consonance

with a number of similar transformations in the academy, grew teeth. The most aggressive of the recent writing has indeed started to look like a coherent movement traveling in an identifiable direction: away from liberal legalism, and toward some holistic conception of legal thinking. This writing, most of it by law professors, uses literature in three ways: to undermine the idea that contemporary American law is an autonomous and internally consistent body of doctrine through the rhetorical, structural, or "deconstructionist" analysis of legal texts; to make or resolve difficulties about the interpretation of legal texts by reference to various theories of literary interpretation; and to argue that some works of literature, by virtue of their superior insight into behavior, expose the limitations of traditional legal categories.

This is where Richard Posner enters the picture. Currently a judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, Posner is widely known as the author of *The Economic Analysis of Law*, one of the principal texts of the Chicago school of the law and economics movement, and as a champion of the free market ideals of classical liberal theory. In 1985 Posner's work was the subject of a *Harvard Law Review* article by Robin West, who argued that the notion that free choice always conduces to well-being, a notion on which Posner's legal theory is heavily dependent, fails to account for apparently uncoerced choices that do not enhance well-being—choices that arise out of masochistic, obsessional, or other self-destructive patterns of behavior. To illustrate this broader view of human nature that she claimed Posner's theory ignores, West counterposed the work of Kafka.

Before West's article appeared, Posner

disciplinary enterprises is the tendency to take the concept of disciplines—especially other people's disciplines—too seriously. Professor X in the political science department, embroiled in some theoretical or methodological dispute within his field, gets the bright idea that Professor Y, downstairs in the anthropology department, might know something about human nature that would help him decide between alternative positions available within the discipline of political science. He will be eager, in other words, to settle his dispute with other political scientists by writing sentences that begin, "As anthropologists have shown . . ." But of course Professor Y's view of human nature is itself almost certainly one of several competing views within the discipline of anthropology, and she is likely to hope for a corroborating fact or two from political science to support her position as well. Thus a shared interest in swapping extradisciplinary authority leads to an interdisciplinary enterprise.

This is a caricature; but it is true that professors are much more prone to say things like "We know this about human nature" or "language" or whatever to people who work in other fields than they are to people who work in their own field and who are likely to respond contentiously with some rival view. Law and literature scholarship is vulnerable precisely to the degree that it trades in this kind of authority, and this vulnerability gives Posner a place to insert his wedge. Posner's strategy is not to question the authority of literary or legal scholarship, but, on the contrary, to respect the autonomy of each discipline, and to point out, usually convincingly, that what literary critics have traditionally been after when they talk about literature and what legal scholars have traditionally been after when they talk about the law are different and unassimilable things.

IN THE CASE of the "law in literature" wing of the movement, Posner's argument is that very few literary works that represent the legal process have anything to do with the contemporary American legal process. The drumhead court-martial in Melville's *Billy Budd*, for instance, is run according to the draconian principles of 18th-century British naval law; Meursault, in *The Stranger*, is tried in the French criminal justice system, which permits evidence about the defendant's character to be introduced at

trial in a way the Anglo-American system prohibits; and so forth. So that to say that Billy's execution or Meursault's conviction illustrates the failure of the legal process to address fully the reality of experience (assuming that that is what they do illustrate) cuts no practical legal ice, since the American system operates differently.

What's more, Posner points out, literary writers are rarely concerned with legal issues in the way lawyers are, and therefore they rarely bother to get the details right. Billy Budd's trial is probably a procedural botch, since the legal provisions for mutinous conditions that Captain Vere invokes to justify his rush to judgment probably did not apply in naval situations. To take another example, the bond Antonio makes with Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* would probably have been unenforceable by the standards of 16th-century Venetian commercial law and is certainly unenforceable by the standards of contemporary American contract law, thus rendering Portia's courtroom pyrotechnics (also of dubious jurisprudential merit) supererogatory. Except that Shakespeare was probably not interested in the efficiency and the fairness of contract law, and Melville was probably not interested in the procedural regularity of Billy's court-martial (except possibly to throw doubt on Vere's motivation). And even if Shakespeare and Melville were interested in those things, those are not the reasons their works have survived in the literary canon. Nothing that English professors have done with those works is likely to be useful to analysts of the American legal system.

POSNER'S discussion of "law as literature" has two targets. "The proposition," he says,

that literary critics can point the way to solving the puzzles of statutory and constitutional interpretation is the falsest of the false hopes of the law and literature movement, while the antipodal proposition that deconstruction and other skeptical strains in contemporary literary criticism can demonstrate the futility, or the inescapable subjectivity, of statutory and constitutional interpretation is one of the hollowest battle cries of the critical legal studies movement.

Again, the argument is premised on the distinction between the disciplines. Posner grants that the way literary critics read a poem can produce meanings that differ with the context and that often di-

verge from, or show little interest in, the specific intentions of the poet. But, he claims, that is the way literature was written to be read. Relatively open-ended interpretation is a convention of the genre. The Constitution or a statute, on the other hand, was written to be read unambiguously, and according to the intentions of the people who produced it. To pass up the work of discovering those intentions on the grounds that literary critics have theorized their way out of doing the same work in the case of a poem is therefore to confuse one kind of writing, which serves one kind of use, with another.

Posner's attack on the indeterminacy thesis of "law as literature" writing, which he associates with the critical legal studies movement, is a little muddled by an uncertainty about the premises of deconstruction, which he says, at one point, regard texts as "incoherent" and, at another point, "do not deny the intelligibility of communicative discourse." But the argument to be made is simple enough. It is that deconstruction is much too corrosive a method to be of any concrete political usefulness; and that once you undertake to dilute the mixture so that you can strip away just as much of the layer of liberal mystification on legal texts as you need to in order to expose the politics operating underneath, you can no longer claim that there is anything "objective" about your method. And of course your own alternative discourse is subject to the same treatment from someone else. Deconstruction doesn't let you prove anything about legal thought because deconstruction is not in the proving business.

INSO FAR as the interdisciplinary enterprise of law and literature makes the claim that the particular knowledge and expertise of the literary critic can advance the particular knowledge and expertise of the lawyer, or vice versa, Posner's critique has bite. And some of the latest work in the field does indeed assert such a claim, on the way to "proving" a political point. But by and large the recent surge in what would be conventionally classified as law and literature scholarship does not reflect an undue respect for the usefulness of other people's disciplines. It reflects a complete lack of respect for the whole idea of disciplines. So concerned to unturn every scholarly stone, Posner has failed to notice that he is toiling in a part of the field that is rapidly being abandoned.

The autonomy of the disciplines is the intellectual cornerstone of the modern university. When Christopher Columbus Langdell became dean of Harvard Law School in 1870, he decided that the law could be learned by reading judicial opinions and divining from those imperfect worldly manifestations the true nature of abstract legal concepts. Thus the case method of legal education was incarnated, and with it the academic doctrine of legal formalism, which regarded the law as an internally consistent body of material distinct from political and social circumstance, and which dominated American legal thinking, despite the challenge of legal realism, into the 1960s.

THE EVOLUTION of modern literature departments was a little more protracted. The first literature professors, the ones who formed the Modern Language Association in 1883, were philologists, and English was so far from being recognized as an independent field of study that for many years at Johns Hopkins, the first American research university, the English faculty was under the administration of the German department. The philologists were eventually supplanted, after the turn of the century, by the literary historians, and it took many years for literary critics—the nature of whose work did not seem sufficiently “scientific”—to establish themselves in the academy. When, in the 1940s and '50s, the New Critics finally did come to dominate the academic study of English literature, they succeeded in part because they practiced a formalist criticism. They regarded literature as an internally consistent body of texts that obeyed its own laws and that responded best to a purely literary (as opposed to political, sociological, or other “extra-disciplinary”) analysis.

In the 1960s and '70s the authority of legal formalism, for reasons internal and external to the academy, crumbled, and with it the disciplinary autonomy of the law. Posner is perfectly aware of this development (and has in fact written about it) because he was himself one of the infidels who toppled the formalist edifice: law and economics, his academic cause, is an attempt to solve legal problems by borrowing the extradisciplinary authority of economics. Which is why attacks like Robin West's on the validity of the human model, derived from economic theory, that is implicit in Posner's legal views require such a thorough rebuttal. That model is not incidental to Posner's

views. It is their justification. In Posner's own work, law has ceased to be an autonomous discipline. Law is merely the clay; economic analysis is the tool that shapes it.

THE ODDEST feature, therefore, of *Law and Literature* is that Posner does not acknowledge that an exactly parallel process has taken place in the study of literature. Very little contemporary academic criticism shows much respect for the autonomy of the discipline. A work of literature in the academy today is taken to be an object that reflects interest; and the forms of interest involve concepts that a formalist critic would regard as extraliterary—race, gender, power. Posner's own literary views, as he confesses quite candidly, are New Critical—which is to say that (for better or worse) they are largely anachronistic in a way that his legal views (also for better or worse) are not.

One consequence of Posner's New Critical outlook is his definition of literature as writing that survives the period of its production—a test-of-time rule for determining literary worth. (Since ethics change, Posner thus believes that “great writers have a remarkable ability to make the reader suspend ethical judgment while reading”—a dictum that seems to me to be as wrong in the case of “great writers” as it is in the case of any other kind of writer.) Posner thus permits into his discussion of law and literature only the literary writing that meets this test—only canonical writing.

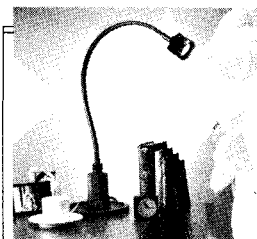
The belief that literature proves its worth by continuing to be read from one generation to the next complements perfectly the belief that underwrites Posner's work in law and economics: the belief that free markets automatically maximize social wealth. It is a faith in the benignity of an invisible, and disinterested, hand. But it confers upon literature just the sort of transhistorical status that is rejected in the methods and mores of contemporary criticism.

Once faith in the literary canon goes, and with it the notion that literary worth is divisible from moral (or political or any other) content, the autonomy of literary study becomes compromised. This is what happened in departments of literature during the period when law and economics scholars and critical legal studies scholars were successfully attacking the doctrine of legal formalism in the law schools. And it is one of the reasons that law and literature, as sub-

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jects of academic inquiry, are now perceived to have so much to do with each other. This is so not because the legal scholar hopes to win any arguments with a theory borrowed from literature, or because the literary scholar expects to solve an interpretive problem with information borrowed from the law. It is because some law professors and some literature professors no longer see any essential difference between the things they are doing.

If such a law professor becomes interested in, for example, the way in which the law borrows from and reinforces a cultural distinction between the sexes, he or she is likely to look at the way sex roles are represented in the language of judicial opinions, in statutes, in popular novels, and in Hollywood movies—and will hardly care about which of those sources belongs to “law” and which belongs to “literature” (or to “cinema studies”). Whether this indifference to the integrity of the disciplines is something to be welcomed or deplored, it underwrites most of the current writing that can be placed under the rubric of law and literature, and there will surely be a great deal more like it in the future. This is a development that Posner’s book, by virtue of the issues it chooses to interrogate, does not address.

Well, is the collapse of disciplinary autonomy a welcome event or not? The answer depends in part on one’s enthusiasm for the academic intellectual enterprise generally. There is certainly nothing natural or inevitable—or even particularly time-honored—about “traditional” disciplinary distinctions. The carving up of learning into separate, autonomously run departments—so that in the study of society, for example, it is decreed that political science professors, anthropology professors, sociology professors, economics professors, and law professors shall each examine a different area using methods and theories designed specially for each discipline—is largely a product of the professionalizing and institutionalizing of knowledge that accompanied the creation of the modern university at the end of the last century. The major remaining justification for slicing things up this way is that isolated departments are easier to administer and specialists are easier to evaluate. Disciplinary independence is not something we should feel too sorry to see withering away.

On the other hand, it seems unlikely that this withering will make the content of academic writing any less hermetic or

its manner any less hubristic. The steam-rolling tendency that flattens every particle of human endeavor into a “text” for critical analysis is one dubious consequence of the collapse of the disciplines. So is the widespread use of “theory” as the great extradisciplinary authority—the writing of sentences that begin, “As Kristeva has shown . . .”

Since much contemporary theory equates the non-theoretical or the anti-theoretical with the politically repressive, its triumph over the disciplines threatens to make the mainstream of scholarly writing a monopoly of the academic left—

though there is certainly no reason why this must be so. But if the point of the new academic dispensation is to break through the inhibitions of formalism so that scholars of all persuasions can be more candid about the interests their work is designed to serve, and if scholars really do become more candid about those interests, that will at least make the whole enterprise more honest. It may mean that we will have fewer books that try to conceal a partisan critique behind the mask of a disinterested contribution to scholarship.

LOUIS MENAND

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

The Selected Correspondence of Kenneth Burke and Malcolm Cowley: 1915-1981
edited by Paul Jay

(Viking, 448 pp., \$29.95)

Malcolm Cowley, who seems to have suggested the publication of his and Kenneth Burke’s correspondence, believes that “there’s nothing like it in the American 20th century.” Perhaps he exaggerates its uniqueness, as well as its historical importance. Dozens of his contemporaries (Edmund Wilson and Allen Tate, for example) were indefatigable letter writers, and vast collections still await exhumation. Still, to my knowledge, no other correspondence between writers of Cowley’s generation is so sustained and so dramatic, or pairs so entertainingly and in such depth two such different minds.

At one end is Burke, whose rhetorical authority is established at the outset. His letters are distinguished by their wit and their Joycean wordplay. He is fond of comic hyperbole. Burke writes unseriously about serious matters and seriously about the comic. He juggles ideas, invents words, argues on both sides of a question, relishes paradox, lectures, instructs. At the other end is Cowley, no second fiddler, and a strong personality, but intellectually subservient to Burke. His letters register his ups and downs, his shifting enthusiasms and active intelligence. Less concentrated than Burke’s and more confessional, they are full of shrewd and amusingly expressed observations about men and books.

The Selected Correspondence is only a generous sample of the total run; and without reading the entire file of roughly 1,700 letters, the reader can’t tell what its editor left out or excised. Asked by the authors to prepare a representative and readable selection, he decided to concentrate on sequences strung on “either a narrative or thematic thread,” and to risk a possible loss in range and variety for the sake of coherence and continuity. This has enabled him to focus on the genesis and the exfoliation of two distinctive personalities, and to show how the very act of letter writing affected that process.

The correspondence can be read as the epistolary autobiographies of two writers who have lived through, and influenced some of, the major literary and cultural movements of their times. It begins in 1915, when the Pittsburgh schoolmates and confidants, drawn to each other by shared literary ambitions, take off on their separate but intertwining trajectories, and it ends more than 400 pages and 66 years later, with the scarred veterans acclaimed by their special publics and ruefully pondering the infirmities of age. Within that span they have scraped for mean livings in New York’s Grub Street: edited magazines and turned out, between them, volumes of criticism, verse, fiction, essays, reviews, transla-

tions, and anthologies. Each has been twice married, fathered children, and given (but mostly taken) blows in the cultural and ideological wars from the 1920s through the 1950s.

Burke, at 92, and Cowley, at 91, are among the last of the American men of letters who managed to survive without exactly striking it rich in the first half of the century. In their middle years, Cowley was the more public and visible of the two. His reviews and essays appeared in the mainstream periodicals. He had established himself by the '50s as the knowledgeable friend of contemporary authors and an engaging elucidator of their works. It took Burke a longer time to achieve comparable recognition, although he probably enjoyed a greater *succès d'estime* in academic circles. He was a hard man to place, to get a handle on: he seemed to be everywhere and nowhere at once. "All your prologues are epilogues," Cowley wrote to him in 1953, "all your first chapters are last chapters, all your introductions wander into new territory and require a lot of Burkeranto that transforms them into afterwords."

Today it is Burke who "shines." His disparate pieces, many of them first published in magazines of small circulation, are seen as fragments of a complex but unified mosaic. Burke is our American Coleridge, the resolute, un intimidated Thinker who constructed his system from the treasures and the middens of culture. "Your light is more intense, as it deserves to be," Cowley writes to him, late in the correspondence, "while mine is more diffuse and dimmed." This characteristically modest judgment is fair enough, although it plays down Cowley's own accomplishments and his equal part in their riveted, if not always tranquil, friendship.

WHAT HELD this friendship together? How could men so different in "temperament, personality, values, and states of mind" (I quote from Paul Jay's excellent introduction) carry on what Cowley called a "contest in vilification" for almost seven decades without their friendship busting up?

Young Burke could be pretty recalcitrant and perverse. He aptly compared himself to "a little round hard rock," and admitted to speaking caustically about what he sympathized with. To be tactful to a friend, he told Cowley, was tantamount to "a subtle method of denigration" that discredited genuine trust, and

he acted on that principle. In one of his dark moments, he defined a "friend" as "none other than that person whom one treats with all the shabbiness and dilatoriness that he scrupulously leaves out of his business relationships." He didn't include Cowley in the Thoreauvian category of "ruthless vandals," but his jibes and reproaches made Cowley feel occasionally that his fondness for Burke exceeded Burke's for him. He accepted his chidings good-naturedly, treated him as an older brother who in his 20s already seemed to him a thousand years old, and deferred to his "genius." Nor was he feigning when he spoke of his vicarious pleasure in Burke's successes. Friendship, after all, required "the transference of egotisms." But he was not about to extinguish himself. His spirited ripostes kept firing up the long debate. Despite moments of indifference and pique, the friendship, which was bonded by memories of beer drinking, poker playing, and compassionating walks, and glued by habit as much as by mutual affection, endured. Each man depended upon the other to be a sounding board for thoughts and feelings he couldn't express to anyone else.

WHAT ARE the letters about? Jay rightly says that if they are "about anything, they are about friendship," but they are also about a lot of other things: literary theory, prose style, and the art of fiction, about psychology, religion, and aesthetics, about lecturing and book reviewing, about politics and the writer, about authors, books, and the marketplace, about historical events from the First World War to Vietnam. At bottom, however, the letters are about the making of two kinds of critics, and the clash of their respective, unmixable schools—literary philosophy and literary journalism.

The Burke of the letters is a private man, reticent about his personal history and immune to "Proust's disease," which is his name for autobiography. Burke's formal education consisted of one semester at Ohio State University, another at Columbia. He became his own university and a devourer of libraries. In his letters he scrambles across fields of knowledge, passes from Pater to Plato, decides he must read Hegel to get fresh light on Spengler, and proceeds to transgress disciplinary frontiers. Cowley wittily likens him to a "very keen-nosed but undertrained hound dog—he starts out a-helling after a rabbit, almost tracks it

down but gets turned aside by the strong scent of a fox, runs into a place where the fox scared up a partridge, hunts for the partridge, feels hungry, and digs up a field mouse." Before the '20s are over, Burke stops writing fiction, because he finds the critic's "shorthand of abstractions" more appealing than the novelist's "long circumlocution." He is launched in a search for the "great Ursymbol," a "generic vocabulary," the form, structure, essence, "super-plot" that subsumes the particulars and, in Henry James's words, "includes all and reconciles all."

Yet he is troubled by the problems of communication. How to present "intricacies of thought" in a comprehensible language "while the great bulk of the world remains as insensitive to aesthetic values as an ape does to Cézanne?" His

THE ORTHODOX WALTZ

Courtship, the seamless mesh
under taffeta havocs
of hoop skirt, smoke

hoops from his Lucky Strikes
her words jumped through.
Women dancing

had the harder part,
she'd heard, because they must
dance backwards.

He kept his ear pressed
like a safecracker's
stethoscope against

her head, kept his
recombinant endearments
tumbling toward a click.

The lachrymose music,
his clasp and lust-
spiel, displaced her

mother's proverbs
the way old aches vanish
in the doctor's office.

How nimble they were, those girls
gliding by on dollies, clinging
to their partners like the masts

of sinking ships.
What had her mother said
that sounded wise? Was it

"Women dancing must be agile
as refugees with jewels
tied to their thighs"?

ALICE FULTON

"extreme technical interest in letters" seems at loggerheads with his recognition that "the basis of humanism is not form but subject matter." Eventually he will solve this apparent dilemma by drawing the moral applications of his theories of grammar, rhetoric, poetics, psychology, and metaphysics from literature, history, anthropology, and popular culture. His is a priestly calling. Very much in the world, Burke is not quite of it. Though he must earn his living by writing and teaching, he is most at home in his mental laboratory, where he can yoke antipodal ideas and conduct his experiments on the criticism of criticism.

THE COWLEY of the letters, by contrast, is a clubbable man: "in there 'contacting' all the time," Burke recalls, "I . . . always slinking away." His literary career begins at Harvard ("our writing today is done by Harvard men," Cowley announced in 1917). He drives ambulances on the Western Front, writing back to urge Burke to take part in "the great common experiences" of America's young manhood "that will mold the thought of the next generation"; he commingles with the expatriates in Paris and gets involved in cultural politics. It is all good preparation for the literary journalist who will in time harvest his memories in books and articles.

He knows himself pretty well. His brain, he tells Burke, is "instrumental" rather than "creative." It doesn't "question enough," but it is an effective tool for writing simply and clearly. When he declares in 1921 that he is no longer ashamed of not being "sufficiently unintelligible" and henceforth intends "to reduce everything to its simplest terms and to build up subtlety by the opposition of simple statements," he's enunciating an aesthetic in harmony with his professional ambitions, an aesthetic that brings him into conflict with Burke. Two years later he lays out their adversarial positions: "You believe that a writer should judge a book according to aesthetic laws which he formulates. In effect, you believe in using a book as a test for an essay on Form. More modest, I believe in defining a book. I believe that there is no distinction, except of degree, between book criticism and a book review, and that your essays on aesthetics parade under a false name. They are good essays but bad reviews."

Burke conceded this distinction between reviews and criticism, but for a long time he looked down his nose at

those free-lancers who had learned the trick of saying "all the standard things without the least discomfiture." For him the book review was "a distinctly minor medium," at best a guise for writing serious criticism. Better silence, the writer's "most precious prerogative," than selling watered literary stock. The controversy sharpened in the '30s, when the issue of the critic and his audience took on a marked political tone. Now Cowley, the literary editor of THE NEW REPUBLIC, had additional reasons to make his brilliant friend more palatable to the educatable public by getting him to downplay his obsession with "technique," to emphasize the "Marxian slant," and to write less abstrusely.

THE LETTERS written between 1927 and the early '40s spell out the mentalities of the two correspondents in a time of social upheaval. Like Cowley, Burke saw in communism the most workable solution for the world's ills, But Burke was never a passionate believer ("I have been on the fringes of many movements, at the center of none"), and he incorporated Marxism into his own vocabulary without being trapped by it. He pointed out the revolutionary implications of fantasy and "escapist" literature, defended readers who "evaded not the depression in society, but the depression in prose," and scorned the literary muckrakers "who think that literature is not singing, but signing an affidavit." Such notions didn't sit well with Party dogmatists.

The ever admiring Cowley valued "the Marxian elements" in Burke's criticism, but he regretted its lack of Marxian purposefulness. Still, he didn't expect Burke to "come on over into our nice Red pasture and play with all us communist boys," and he was right. Burke continued to address literary matters in his Burkean way, trying to bridge the gap between social and internal analysis, calling attention to the pragmatics of political symbolism, getting rapped by the Communist mandarins for his pains.

Until 1939 the letters contain virtually nothing about Cowley's links with Popular Front groups or his justification of the Moscow trials. Only after the Russian-German pact did Cowley pour out his disenchantment to a not very sympathetic Burke. "Betrayed" by the sellout at Munich, he had almost felt like "going into the service of the Comintern" like the hero of Hemingway's bad play. In the soul-searching weeks that followed,

he pondered his espousal of Russian communism, and also his dehumanizing years at THE NEW REPUBLIC when, unprotected by the hide of insensitivity that in his opinion preserved Edmund Wilson from corruption, he found himself playing the bureaucrat and the power broker. It was really easier, he concluded, "to give your life for a cause than to hold out for a particular sentence that embodies your way of life."

In the fall and winter of 1940, egged on by "the old wish to kill one's past and be reborn," he sketched a plan to write a résumé of the 1930s, a kind of collective novel with an anonymous hero. Whether Burke detected a strain of self-pity in Cowley's expanded outline or was simply releasing pent up irritations, he faulted the proposed chronicle and scolded Cowley for his past behavior. There was "too much journalism and diarism" in the project "and not enough criticism." Couldn't he "outstretch the extreme localism of 'the decade' "? Why feel let down because Stalin managed to "shift Hitler from Russia's neck to Britain's"? And why think the world was waiting for his statement? The Soviet-Nazi agreement hurt "the typical U.S. intellectual" because it deprived him of simultaneously enjoying "the fruits of his salary" and thinking of himself "as a rip-roaring advance guard revolutionary." Rather than attacking the Party and beating his breast, he ought to congratulate himself on having broken with the literary finaglers, for he had been "on the road to becoming a simply awful person." It was time to stop "bellyaching" and get busy.

FROM THE mid-'40s on, the letters grow more serene, although McCarthyism and the Hiss trial awakened old anxieties (tough on Hiss, Burke remarks that his name was "poetically associated with the snake") and the correspondents comfortably revert to their agreed-upon disagreements. Cowley works on his literary annals, Burke on his Summa. They begin to think more kindly of each other's works and methods. Cowley hails Burke as the first writer he can think of "who transformed a book review into poetry, real, inventive, out-on-the-limb poetry but remained at the same time a book review." Burke praises a collection of Cowley's 1930s pieces for their "shrewd appraisals" and "good judgment" and their "remarkable expertness in characterizing for the reader the book you are discussing," and finds fresh

things in Cowley's many-windowed criticism and in his histories of generations and trends.

Recognition comes to both, in the form of prizes and awards and invitations to lecture; both are the subjects of books and articles. Cowley is delighted that Burke's "intrepid admirers" have cut through the barriers he's created and arrived "at your kitchen door bearing incense and myrrh and checks for fifteen grand." Burke is pleased to discover that "though we come out of the woods from different directions, we end up by finding ourselves pretty much in the same clearing." And so they have, although they occupy complementary halves of it.

Differences remain. Burke still thinks Cowley overstates "the society side of the relations between the author and his tribe." Cowley still complains about Burke's "crabbed" style, his excessive use of words of Greek derivation, his sentence structure and paragraph divi-

sions. But after years of bickering and bantering, of stiff altercations, they have reached an instructive *modus vivendi*: each compensates for the deficiencies of the other. And the reader of their correspondence has seen enacted one of Burke's famous principles, "perspective by incongruity."

In the current circumstances of the academy, what Burke calls his "terministic entanglements" are the stuff of the critical school he refers to as the "nouveaux thinkeroos." We gratefully feed on the inexhaustible Burke. And we undervalue the clear and perceptive writing of the unmodish Cowley. Both are as necessary to us, however, as they were to each other.

DANIEL AARON

Daniel Aaron is professor emeritus of English at Harvard University and the author of *Writers on the Left* (Oxford University Press).

WE ARE ALL PROGRESSIVES NOW

The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism: The Market, the Law, and Politics by Martin J. Sklar

(Cambridge University Press, 496 pp., \$49.50, \$15.95 paper)

Ronald Reagan came into office in 1981 proclaiming that government was the problem, not the solution; but during his two terms, he presided over the most significant increase in government's economic role since the early 1970s, if not the 1930s. Not only did government's share in the gross national product increase, but the government dramatically increased its role in trade, international finance, and private research and development. Yet Reagan and his Republican supporters continued to proclaim publicly the evils of government and the virtues of an unfettered free market.

This looming contradiction between policy and ideology did not originate with Reagan. A succession of presidents from Franklin Roosevelt through Reagan have spoken the language of Adam Smith and Andrew Jackson while undertaking programs inspired by Keynes and Japan's MITI. The last time that Americans debated the role of government openly, ex-

tensively, and explicitly was during the Progressive Era, and it was then that the current limits of debate and discussion were established. At that time we seem to have contracted historical amnesia, from which we have only fleetingly recovered.

In a new book, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism*, Martin J. Sklar tells the story of that early debate and explains how it was resolved. In the process, Sklar reveals the assumptions about government and large corporations that underlie current practice, but are rarely voiced in public debate. His book helps explain what unites such rhetorically diverse politicians as George Bush, Michael Dukakis, Ronald Reagan, and Jesse Jackson.

The Progressive Era was a watershed for American capitalism. During the pre-World War I decades, the American economy was transformed from a highly competitive system based on small family-owned businesses and farms to a highly



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interlocked and internally administered system dominated by large stockholder-owned corporations. At the same time, America ceased to be an insular economic and military power. Instead of looking west across an unsettled continent, Americans now looked overseas.

The rise of corporate capitalism threatened Americans' most basic political ideas. The descendants of Locke, Jefferson, and Jackson believed that liberty and equality were predicated on the diffusion of small-property ownership, and on the supremacy of society, organized through property ownership, over the state. Corporate capitalism destroyed the possibility of a classless capitalism, however, and threatened to create in its place a society divided between a capitalist class and a large, property-less working class. Through its concentrated economic power, the small capitalist class would create a corporate state.

America's rise as a world power equally threatened Americans' anti-colonial and anti-imperial convictions. Americans feared that in order to gain overseas markets, the United States would be forced to enter the sordid struggle for colonies that was already tearing apart the European nations. Qualms about overseas expansion were quieted by Secretary of State John Hay's enunciation in 1899 of the Open Door policy, which put Americans on the side of anti-colonialism at the same time as it inaugurated a new era of investment imperialism. Sklar shows that in the early 20th century, Charles Conant and Paul Samuel Reinsch developed the theory of modern imperialism—imperialism as an outlet for surplus capital—that is often credited to Hobson and Lenin. But the looming contradiction between Jeffersonian democracy and corporate capitalism took another decade, and the climactic, three-cornered election of 1912, to resolve.

THERE WERE, broadly, three different responses to the growth of large corporations: populist, socialist, progressive. Sklar terms the populists "restorationists" who wanted to restore the older competitive capitalism by curbing the giant corporations. The socialists wanted to replace corporate capitalism with a state-directed socialism. The progressives wanted to reconcile corporate capitalism with America's liberal tradition. The populists blamed external factors (political corruption, the gold standard) for the Great Depression of the 1890s and subsequent panics; the socialists and

the progressives shared a view that overproduction was endemic to corporate capitalism. The socialists sought the solution in state ownership and control; the progressives, in a private but regulated capitalism and in overseas markets for America's surplus goods.

As a corporate-led social movement that also enjoyed the substantial support of small business and labor, and that stood for social peace and stability, progressivism vanquished populism. While competitive capitalism and populist politics "appeared, in the experience of the 1890s, to be disintegrative to large sectors of both the metropolitan and provincial populations, large-scale capitalism and the pro-corporate movement appeared to them to be re-integrative," Sklar writes. "For all the outcries against 'big business,' 'the trusts' . . . emanating from agrarian populists and middle-class reformers, the large bureaucratic corporation offered [more] opportunities of social mobility for middle-class people, new and sturdier ladders of success, than the family-based farm or other business."

PROGRESSIVISM did not so much defeat as "contain" socialism. It adopted elements of the socialist program of reform and critique of corporate capitalism, but it rejected socialism as a form of state domination of society. It sought to eliminate not class divisions, but a politics based on class warfare. It sought to undermine the very conception of class differences.

The key political battle of the McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt administrations was waged over the interpretation of the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. Originally intended to rule out only unfair restraints of trade by corporations—for instance, the prevention of free entry into a market by another firm—the Court began interpreting it in 1897 to forbid any restraint of trade whatsoever, including mergers and cartels. While the populists applauded the new interpretation, the progressives were united in opposing it, in seeking to return to the prior "common law" interpretation of Sherman.

But the progressive consensus was shattered by the Court's decision in 1911 to return to the prior "common law" interpretation of the Sherman Act. To William Howard Taft, Roosevelt's hand-picked successor, the Court's decision made further government regulation unnecessary and—insofar as it encouraged a trend toward socialism—dangerous. To Roosevelt, the Court's decision removed

a threat to corporate capitalism, but it did not remove the danger of class rule, or the destructive avarice with which corporate capitalism threatened society. Running against Taft in 1912 as a third party Progressive, Roosevelt, who had adopted the program but not the goals of socialism, sought to broaden the scope of government regulation to include not only trade practices, but investment decisions, wages, prices, and working conditions. In Sklar's words, Roosevelt ran as "a left-wing statist who was prepared to play a leadership role in achieving significant changes in the 'form of government,' the government-society relation, and the nature of property rights."

SKLAR does not accept the common misreading of Wilson's "new freedom" as a program to restore laissez-faire capitalism. Like Taft and Roosevelt, Wilson acknowledged the inevitability of corporate capitalism, but aimed to temper, through government regulation, the "sharp class contrasts and divisions" that it fostered. Unlike Roosevelt, however, Wilson stopped short of altering the relationship between government and society. Through the Federal Trade Commission, he supplemented the power of the judiciary with executive investigatory power, but he limited the scope of the FTC to correcting unfair trade practices, as defined under the common law interpretation of the Sherman Act. The FTC had no power over prices, wages, mergers, or stock offerings. While Roosevelt wanted to treat all corporations as "public utilities" that should be regulated in the public interest, Wilson preserved the distinction between the few corporations like railroads that functioned as public utilities and had to be closely regulated, and the great majority, which were best left to their own devices.

Sklar argues that Wilson succeeded precisely because he, unlike Roosevelt, honored the relationship between society and government. "Wilson's was a synthetic outlook—more suited to non-revolutionary times than Theodore Roosevelt's," Sklar writes. Wilson's reform legislation, which included the FTC, the creation of the Federal Reserve, and the downward revision of the tariff, effectively closed the debate over corporations. "Just as the Open Door may be said to have ended the debate between imperialists and anti-imperialists, so the Wilson legislation ended the debate over the legitimacy of the large corporation."

Sklar designates the progressives' attempt to reconcile corporate capitalism with the American liberal tradition "corporate liberalism." Corporate liberalism has defined American politics from Wilson through Reagan. It "has ever been a blend, in shifting proportions, of Wilsonian democracy and Taft Republicanism, holding the line against, while drawing piecemeal upon, Rooseveltian statism, whether square dealing or new dealing on the equalitarian left." Sklar made a similar point in 1960, in an influential essay on Wilson; and he and historian William Appleman Williams were principally responsible for the revisionist analysis of modern liberalism that flowered during the next decade. His new book, the product of three decades of research, is surely the most sophisticated presentation of those ideas.

SKLAR'S earlier essay, Williams's *Contours of American History*, and James Weinstein's *Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State* seemed to suggest the political limits of a regnant New Deal liberalism: that what some historians and politicians had taken to be an expression of working-class upsurge was in fact the product of a corporate-led coalition. Although Sklar's point was subtler, many in the New Left came to see liberalism far too narrowly as an instrument of corporate co-optation, and corporate liberalism as a scheme hatched by corporate leaders to destroy the left.

In *The Corporate Reconstruction*, Sklar shows that corporate liberalism was a broad-based movement whose ideas were far more deeply rooted in the American political tradition than were those of the pre-war American socialists—or, for that matter, of the Communist left that succeeded the socialists. This does not mean that socialism is impossible in America. It does mean that an American socialism will have to reflect the same liberal anti-statist tradition that corporate liberalism adhered to.

Thus, Sklar casts the current liberal-conservative rivalries in a new light. Both "liberal" and "conservative" politics appear as subsets of the larger corporate liberal or progressive synthesis. If Dukakis or Jackson are the descendants of Wilson and Roosevelt, Reagan and Goldwater are the descendants of Taft, who accepted corporate reality, but who, fearful of socialism, insisted on a far more minimal executive regulation of corporate power than Wilson or Roosevelt.

From this extraordinary vantage point, what has appeared contradictory suddenly becomes consistent. Reagan's anti-statist rhetoric, for instance, sometimes suggests that he favors a return to 19th-century competitive capitalism. But Reagan belongs in the tradition of Taft, who opposed Roosevelt's plan for regulating corporate capitalism, rather than in the the populist tradition of Sockless Jerry Simpson, who wanted to restore Jacksonian America. While Reagan spoke the language of the frontier, the underlying framework of his thought and action was shaped by corporate capitalism.

This is even more true of his successor, George Bush. Bush endorses "positive government," but also subscribes to underlying limits on government intervention in the market, and to the supremacy of society over government. Bush himself appears unaware of the parallel to Wilson, but Thomas Kean, the governor of New Jersey and the key-note at the Republican convention in New Orleans, is not: hearkening back to another governor of New Jersey, he called his Bush endorsement speech "The New Freedoms."

THE OLD progressive debate over government and the corporations was reopened briefly during the 1930s, but like the debate over imperialism, it has been repressed both by Wilson's political success and by America's success as an economy and a world power. Increasing government intervention has not been accompanied by increasing awareness of the real relationship between government and the economy, but rather by continued and dogged adherence to a 19th-century model of economic life. This has the consequence of reinforcing the rhetoric of the right, and preventing Rooseveltian proposals from coming to light.

But changes in our relationship to world capitalism threaten to make this rhetoric obsolete and to reopen the old progressive debate. The Open Door policy was best suited to a world in which America had to compete against imperial powers that were more powerful militarily, not economically. Later, having become the leader of world capitalism, the United States had to pay the price of empire—in Cuba, Southeast Asia, and in the growing economic burden of military budgets. Corporate liberalism's permissive attitude toward investment decisions has allowed corporations, seeking lower wages, to relocate overseas, and to put off investments in plant and equip-

ment that might have permitted the United States to compete against such state-directed economies as Japan.

As a result, Americans are faced with the prospect of protracted industrial decline and an erosion in our standard of living. This prospect begs questions that should shatter the corporate liberal calm. When the government grants trade relief to an industry battered by competition, should it extract promises in return? Should the government take responsibility for the survival of our steel industry, for the success of our semiconductor industry? Should it encourage recalcitrant firms to initiate employee ownership and joint worker-management teams? These questions go beyond Wilson and Taft toward a conception, of the kind advanced by Roosevelt, of industries as public utilities. They don't take us beyond progressivism or corporate liberalism, to be sure; but they do presage a more conscious and responsible debate about the relationship of government to society. Sklar's book is an important contribution to that debate.

JOHN B. JUDIS

John B. Judis is a senior editor of *In These Times* and the author of *William F. Buckley Jr.: Patron Saint of the Conservatives* (Simon and Schuster).

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THE ALCHEMIST

Ben Jonson: A Life by David Riggs

(Harvard University Press, 416 pp., \$35)

The facts of Ben Jonson's life read like an oversensational historical novel. He killed two men and escaped hanging for the second incident only by appealing to an archaic clerical statute. On his release, in 1598, his thumb branded "T" for the Tyburn gallows, he promptly risked his life again by becoming a Catholic convert, a step courting severe reprisals from the state and bringing him into contact with the conspirators who plotted to blow up Parliament in 1605. His family history was checkered: a compulsive adulterer, he abandoned his wife twice, while his mother publicly announced after his release from another bout of imprisonment that she would have poisoned him had he been convicted.

Gaining court employment under James I, Jonson wrote masques to celebrate with equal enthusiasm the marriage of the Earl of Essex to Frances Howard and then her remarriage (after arranging for the poisoning of an enemy) to the king's new favorite, the Earl of Somerset. A year later he was helping to engineer the displacement of Somerset by George Villiers, whose elegant legs enabled him to dance his way into James's favor; in a private entertainment Jonson urged the homosexual king to "enter / Him, and his house, and search him to the center."

In contrast to this lurid life, Jonson's art has the reputation of being static and frigidly classical. Of his extensive poetic and dramatic works, only a few brilliant comedies have remained popular, and even they are not performed as often as they deserve. Coleridge spoke of *The Alchemist* as being equalled only by *Oedipus Rex* and *Tom Jones* in the perfect construction of its plot, and a performance with the degree of coordination the play requires can indeed reach an almost unbearable comic intensity. The recent Royal Shakespeare Company revival of *The New Inn*, which was hissed off the stage on its first night in 1629 and has traditionally been seen as part of Jonson's "dotage," proves the play still holds a lot of dramatic interest today; David Riggs, writing before that production, underestimates its potential. Jonson's writings have remained buried under what T. S.

Eliot described as a "perfect conspiracy of approval": he is praised for his erudition, his obedience to the laws of neoclassical poetry, his rejection of the sensationalism found in other contemporary dramatists, and his unflinching moral earnestness. Such praise amounts to burial.

Jonson must bear some responsibility for this moralistic image, for he helped construct it himself. Riggs's admirable new biography charts the process by which Jonson gradually sloughed off the more socially dubious aspects of his origins. At the start of the Jacobean era, he changed the spelling of his name from "Johnson" to "Jonson," thus affirming an identity that was self-created rather than inherited. The Folio volume of 1616 excluded *Bartholomew Fair*, the play in which Jonson had come closest to celebrating popular culture with a festive ending in which carnival triumphed for a moment over moralism and authoritarianism. Jonson placed the severely neoclassical *Catiline* at the end of the folio, and the whole presentation of his writings marked him as transcending his vulgar origins and attaining a timeless elitist classicism.

Recent literary theory has tried to dislodge the authority of the author in favor of that of the reader. As Riggs points out, Jonson asserted more vigorously than any of his contemporaries the priority of author over reader or audience. Playwrighting for profit was traditionally regarded as a mechanical, ungentlemanly activity; in publishing his plays as "Works" on an equal basis with his poems, Jonson was making a bid for social as well as literary respectability.

A comparable tendency to efface his past can be traced in Jonson's private life. Twice he left his family in poverty and sought patronage among the literary and social elite. Where he did try to recover his past, it was in mythical terms: his father having died soon after his birth, his mother remarried a bricklayer, and as Jonson became more and more respectable under a Scottish king, he started remembering or fabricating a past for his real father as a member of the Scottish landed gentry.

If such a process of self-sublimation could be totally successful, the art it produced would be of little interest. Riggs sets out to show that Jonson's struggle with his earlier selves was never entirely resolved, that it informed his mature art. The creator of Volpone, that Machiavelian fox, himself kept a pet fox. Jonson admitted that he himself, like his own Face and Subtle, had dressed up as an alchemist and fooled gullible members of the public. If we know so much about Jonson's life, it is to a considerable degree because of his own delight in a less sober version than the authorized Folio image permitted.

Not long after the Folio appeared, Jonson went on a walking tour through Scotland during which he called on the poet William Drummond. It was surely a pleasure in teasing this sober, highly academic Scottish poet that made Jonson unbutton and pour out a series of salacious anecdotes about himself and his friends, and a volley of abuse against most of his fellow writers, many of them figures Drummond hero-worshiped from afar. These conversations Drummond transcribed, and they remain our chief source for Jonson's life. Still, to call them a "source" is perhaps misleading, for what they record is a performance, aimed to shock and to startle as much as to record straight biographical fact. Jonson's mature plays were comparable shock tactics, in conjuring up the very socially and morally unruly forces they set themselves to discipline.

Such phenomena invite a psychoanalytic interpretation. While Riggs's attempts in this direction are, as he says, "frankly speculative" and not theoretically developed, he is able to make far more sense than previous commentators of the ways in which the rhythms of Jonson's personal life interacted with his public career. His sense of being ousted by a stepfather arguably accounted for the fact that, according to Drummond, he derived more excitement from the act of cuckolding than from sex itself; scenes in which cuckolded husbands are humiliated certainly pervade his plays.

Jonson also repeated the parental neglect he resented, deserting his wife for protracted periods; and Riggs is able to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the motif of the guilty parent and betrayed children in the plays and poems. For Edmund Wilson, of course, "morose Ben Jonson" was an anal-erotic personality. Riggs retorts that he was, after all, a

free-spending character, and that he was able to a considerable degree to transcend his neuroses in art. Jonson's personality may have been molded by the fact that his stepfather built a garden over a sewer, but in his mature art "Jonson . . . discovered how to turn manure into a valuable commodity."

WHICH BRINGS us to the rise of capitalism. Riggs's particular mode of psychoanalytic inquiry may risk banality by presenting art as a transcendent solution to life's problems, but he complements it with a more sociologically specific approach. Like so much recent writing on Renaissance literature, his biography bears the mark of Stephen Greenblatt and other "new historicist" critics, who have emphasized that the gardens of Parnassus are always constructed over the sewers of material circulations and exchanges. Riggs is more indulgent to the author than some contemporary theorists, but he does pay attention to the power relations in which Jonson's text are involved, and he recognizes that such an "impure" approach can make Jonson far more interesting than a static celebration of timeless beauties.

In his pioneering study *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*, L. C. Knights presented Jonson as a moralistic critic of the new market-oriented social relations that were destroying the values and relations of a traditional, hierarchical "organic community." That analysis fails, however, to register some crucial contradictions. It is true that the Elizabethans responded to the new forces of the market with a revulsion hard to recapture in modern capitalist countries, so powerfully have those forces become naturalized. But the breakdown of older social relations was also opening up new media of communication that permitted a massive growth in public political consciousness.

Jonson was strongly hostile to the ancestors of the modern newspaper. Yet he was sensitive enough to new media to be able to envisage perfect beauty as "a printed book without a blot"; and his own plays were part of the new social processes that he deplored as a moralist. Whereas earlier dramatic performances had been staged for particular feast days or aristocratic occasions, the new theaters catered to the heterogeneous groups that were flocking to the growing metropolis, which were united only by having paid money for their seats. Drama helped stimulate the growing critical

and political consciousness that was manifested in an increasing demand for political news and analysis, and was to form the basis for opposition to traditional political structures in the 1640s.

Jonson was born in an alley off the Strand, the center of that area between court and city that was becoming known as "the town," where the leisured gentry purchased and displayed their new luxuries. His *Epicoene* mocked such conspicuous consumption, and yet attendance at the theater was itself precisely such a form of consumption; and he had himself written an entertainment for the opening of the New Exchange in the Strand.

RIGGS'S narrative shows how Jonson tried to suppress his origins in the impurity of the public stage without ever quite succeeding. Whereas Shakespeare was content to remain a member of a professional repertory company, Jonson's relations with his fellow actors and his managers were always touchy, and he restlessly moved from one theater to another. In an escalating rhythm throughout his career, periods of activity in the public theaters would be followed by angry renunciations of the stage and a withdrawal into the world of aristocratic patronage.

The carrot of patronage was reinforced, of course, by the state's stick. Riggs prints an illustration of the severed leg of one of the Gunpowder conspirators about to be plunged into boiling pitch: "This spectacle," he remarks, "helps explain Jonson's decision to cooperate with the authorities." (Riggs's illustrations are well chosen and illuminatingly glossed throughout.) As the political crises of the Stuart monarchy intensified, Jonson cooperated with the court more and more enthusiastically. Riggs shows that he was able to steer with some skill between opposing factions, and that he was not unambiguously aligned with the more absolutist courtiers.

But the description of his stance as "centrist" perhaps overdoes his moderation. As James tilted the dominant mode of political debate from public parliamentary consultation toward the private intrigue of what historians colorfully term "bedchamber politics," Jonson piloried those who opposed this process. When the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War in 1618 put the future of continental Protestantism in jeopardy, there was a widespread demand for James to end England's neutrality and align himself

with the European Protestant powers. This crisis stimulated an immense demand for national and international news, which was fed by professional letter writers and by the publishers of embryo newspapers. James's response was to impose even stronger censorship, and Jonson enthusiastically cooperated. In his masque *News From the New World Discovered In the Moon* and the play *The Staple of News*, he satirized the newsmongers as monopolists eager to turn news into a commodity. His attitude contrasts dramatically with the rhapsodic enthusiasm for the new media that Milton was to demonstrate in *Areopagitica*.

In financial terms, Jonson's growing alignment with the monarchy was successful. James gave him a substantial pension. He got on less well with Charles, but Riggs questions the conventional view that his last years were marked by a definitive loss of court favor and resultant poverty; Jonson accommodated himself well enough to the Caroline regime to receive reasonable means, even if he resolutely lived beyond them. But those retreats from the public sphere were not his most productive phases. Greater financial security offered by patronage allowed him more time to write poetry, an activity in which he had justifiably high ambitions.

STILL, as Riggs points out, Jonson won his greatest favor at court during the rise of the gentlemen-amateur mode to which he himself had adapted, but which arguably failed to stimulate his greatest powers. The masques to which he devoted much of his energy may have displayed his erudition, but there was something bristlingly defensive about the way he drew his readers' attention to the astonishing depths of scholarly profundity in these luxurious charades that would have had his hero Cicero turning in his grave.

Riggs notes that in the celebrated portrait painted soon after he received his pension, Jonson's eyes turn away from the viewer as if "reluctant . . . to accept the fact of his own eminence." By retaining the demotic "Ben" beside the refined "Jonson," he resisted a sense of total incorporation in the establishment; but he risked accepting its patronizing terms, himself contributing to what Peter Womack, in a provocative recent study of Jonson, has described as "the myth of 'Ben,' the 'difficult' yet estimable and somehow very English individual who tramps through the drawing room of the literary establishment as if

he were the head gardener."

Jonson's best writing partook of the new political and social forces it repudiated. Most of his plays, it is increasingly recognized, are as much about the duplicity of the theater itself as about the duplicity of the intriguers they satirize. Plays like *The Alchemist* gain their breathtaking force from the knife-edge between celebration and revulsion. The play is set in a house whose master has fled London because of a plague, and it was first performed in a playhouse that was itself under threat of closure because of the plague. If the audience was drawn to condemn the intriguers Face and Subtle and to ridicule their dupes, it also had to acknowledge that its own delight in dissimulation led it to take more drastic risks than the dupes themselves.

Jonson's plays never entirely lost that galvanizing element of innovative risk. Their main limitation, perhaps, is the obverse of their strength, the extreme sharpness of that knife-edge, the ultimately reductive equation of art with intrigue. But that sharpness saved him from sentimentality, and always counterbalanced the more wistful cadences in which he sometimes allowed himself to speak of plays and news in his last years:

What a deal of cold business doth a man mis-spend the better part of life in! In scattering compliments, tendering visits, gathering and venting news, following feasts and plays, making a little winter-love in a dark corner.

DAVID NORBROOK

David Norbrook teaches English at Magdalen College, Oxford, and is the author of *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (Routledge).

TRB, from page 4

the cost. It would have to be part of a grand bargain under which the Latin Americans would meet U.S. concerns in areas like drugs and Central American security. Robert A. Pastor of Emory University, who made Latin policy for President Carter, has been pushing such a bargain, in an article in *Foreign Policy* and in conversations with Bush administration officials. "We've made grand bargains before, and what we tend to forget is that they've worked," Pastor says. "The Alliance for Progress, in 1961, worked. Revolutions didn't happen.

Economic growth did. It can be done again, only this time it has to be more subtle. The linkages have to be tacit, not explicit. The basic issue for the Bush administration is whether to withdraw by indecision or to assume leadership. Right now they're kibitzing on the edges."

On that score, so far so bad. Secretary of State James Baker, when he was secretary of the treasury in the Reagan administration, compiled an impressive record of putting the interests of the big Wall Street banks over the national interest in a debt solution. (See "Robbin' Hoods" by Jeffrey Sachs, page 19.) Vice President Quayle went to Caracas for Andrés Pérez's inauguration, stepped off the plane, and announced gratuitously that the United States is "absolutely opposed" to a "debtors' cartel." (Come to think of it, a debtors' cartel sounds like the sort of thing the United States should be joining, not denouncing.) Quayle added, employing one of the Latin Americans' least favorite locutions, that the United States favors stability down there because "these countries are our back yard."

The most urgent opportunity the administration seems to be booting is in Central America. A pair of dramatic recent developments—the agreement among the five Central American presidents to disband the *contras* in exchange for further steps toward pluralism in Nicaragua, and the Salvadoran guerrillas' offer to participate in, and respect the results of, the upcoming presidential election if it is postponed from March to September—could change everything, but only if the United States moves quickly and decisively. That, so far, the administration shows neither the inclination nor the ability to do.

If this chance is passed up, the probable result will be a victory for the right-wing ARENA party in El Salvador in March, followed by a definitive descent into carnage. "If that happens," says Bruce Babbitt, "there'll no longer be an American role in El Salvador. We simply can't be a party to another military-directed suppression of that society."

Pastor is more optimistic, arguing that perhaps the Salvadoran guerrillas could be induced to participate in municipal elections down the road. "Anyway," he adds wryly, "the more things deteriorate, the greater the opportunity to improve them." By that standard, at least, the Bush administration can be said to be headed in the right direction.

HENDRIK HERTZBERG

CORRESPONDENCE, from page 6

bear the costs and stop being so "finicky" about "environmental pollution . . . bodily health, comfort, and even purity."

I look forward to more good satire. To avoid scurrilous charges from some of those ultraserious Naderites, however, perhaps future articles should be labeled "we're only kidding."

ARTHUR BRYANT

Trial Lawyers for Public Justice
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

Many Americans live lives that flaunt their risk-taking. The engineer who reported to his superiors, and then to others when his superiors wouldn't listen, that the o-rings were faulty on the Challenger risked his livelihood and reputation to protect the astronauts. The young Americans who refused to serve in the Vietnam War risked imprisonment and exile for the honor of this country. The asbestos workers who brought suits against Johns Manville sacrificed their final days so that their families would receive compensation and other workers in the future would not suffer as they had. The lawyers who defend the indigent risk all compensation and their reputations when they oppose the powerful.

NANCY COTTON

New Orleans, Louisiana

To the editors:

Henry Fairlie can best be described as a neo-cowboy, saddened at the loss of America's sense of limitlessness, the loss of faith in the ever-advancing frontier. Mr. Fairlie, it's time to wake up, we're big people now. It's all gone. We used it up. We reached California. I suspect that the end of the American dream came when there weren't any more Indians to shoot or free land to take, when we couldn't buy any more slaves or get some cheap rubber plantations. But we pressed on, paying steelworkers ten times the world wage and driving around in two-and-a-half tons of metal.

Fairlie takes issue with the goals of the environmentally minded, and seems to be saying we humans are all that matter. He wants us to continue to consider ourselves alone to be god's gift to the universe—and yet selflessly believers in the goodness of technologists and industrialists. I guess he just wants it all, in the manner of so many before him.

MICHAEL GALLAGHER

Santa Fe, New Mexico

BOSTON DIARIST

Pumping Irony

AT THE END of the South End of Boston, past the defunct tramlines and the soul-food restaurants, there stands the old Catholic cathedral of Boston, the Cathedral of the Holy Cross. One of the advantages of living in any "inner city" is the existence of places like this. Urban cathedral parishes tend to be disparate and degenerate, immune to the charms of well-meaning pastors, whose effect on much of suburban Catholicism has been to convert it into group therapy sessions in churches remodeled to look like the set on "Good Morning America." Last Sunday's Cathedral mass, in contrast, testified to the resilience of old-fashioned, God-fearing urban excess. It was a weird mélange of late '80s Catholicism: '60s folk music, semi-controlled children, black and Hispanic families, tall student-types in leather jackets and ponytails, a man with a strong Irish voice singing the psalms, a largely silent impromptu choir, and a priest who worked the pews with Donahue-esque slickness. Tucked away in a garish side chapel, hidden from the august and empty nave, the service had the feel of something casual to the point of affront, not so much dismissive as thoughtless of the cathedral's retired grandeur, and of the spirituality it once did and still could inspire. But there was also a very Catholic ease to it all, a confident incoherence, suggestive of a faith that needs scant demonstration and of a community that, like all real communities, has no need to speak its name or claim its own. The only catch is that my own particular brand of urban excess—which normally results in my being unconscious at 10 o'clock on Sunday morning—largely prevents my being a part of it.

HERE'S MY DREAM presidential lineup for 1992: Joe Kennedy against Dan Quayle, the irresistibly coarse meets the immovably abject. (The final presidential debate to be presided over, of course, by Morton Downey Jr.) The thought occurred to an unusually paranoid friend of mine after a panel discussion I took part in with Representative Kennedy at Harvard's Kennedy School, an experience known to seasoned Kennedyphiles as something close to a Kennedy warp. (The effect is somewhat intensified by the fact that the John F. Kennedy School is located on John F. Kennedy Street, next to the John F. Ken-

nedy Park, surrounded, no doubt, by quite a few John F. Kennedy trees.) The event, it turned out, was originally suggested by Joe as a way to increase public knowledge about Northern Ireland, a worthy enough endeavor, only slightly complicated by Joe's revelation in the course of the evening that he thought no one in Northern Ireland had the right to vote and that the population of the Republic was six million, a fact that might surprise the three million or so Irish who, despite their intrepid, if intermittent, disavowal of most forms of birth control, have as yet failed to reproduce with what Joe obviously considers the correct amount of enthusiasm. Or perhaps he was simply urging the Irish to enjoy themselves a bit more, advice they will no doubt take in the same spirit they are by now used to taking advice from the next would-be governor of Massachusetts. Stoically.

FANS OF INFINITE regression whose capacity for Kennedys is limited have an alternative this month: *Spy* magazine. The March cover story of the mass-market fashion/satire magazine contains a blistering attack on consumers of mass-market fashion/satire, which seems, to those of us who shell out \$2.95 for *Spy*'s monthly correspondence course in self-help hipness, well, a little ungrateful. All along, it seems, we missed the point. All along, we thought buying *Spy* was wittingly hip, whereas in fact it was unwittingly unhip. For all our smugness, we were merely part of "the era of the permanent smirk, the knowing chuckle, of jokey ambivalence as a way of life." We had fallen prey to what the article describes as the Irony Epidemic, a condition that, given the point of the article and the rationale of *Spy*, the authors have evidently escaped. The Epidemic, *Spy* goes on, was one in which otherwise hopelessly unhip children of the '80s made fun of themselves by watching reruns of *Bewitched*, wore fashionably unfashionable clothes, and enjoyed *Spy*'s '50s-kitsch graphics, while never realizing how unutterably pathetic their lives really were. But now we know the terrible truth: "Today's irony-stricken yuppie lives in terror of becoming . . . anything. . . . Admitting to marriage, parenthood—to maturity—implies aging, stolidity. If everything is a

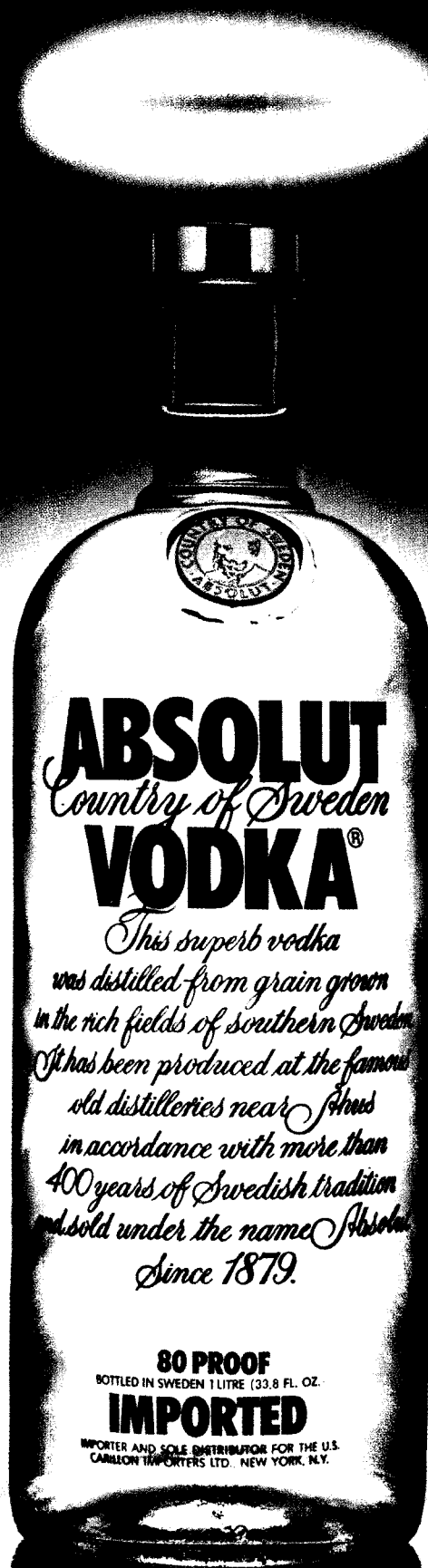
pose, a sitcom riff, then you're still a kid, just goofing around." OK, *Spy*, so we'll grow up. Who knows, one day, when we've left our *Spy*-reading days behind, we might even begin to *be* somebody or *believe* something. Maybe we could even get married, start a magazine, make a fortune, amuse an awful lot of people, and then be rude to them. Now *that's* hip.

AN UNHIPLY WITTY and oddly ignored literary genre of our time is the record sleeve. My favorite at the moment is an album of "Techno Detroit" dance music, which should end all worries from Allan Bloom et al. that popular music is some kind of cultural nemesis. Techno Detroit is an offshoot of Chicago House music, the deconstructed synthesizer sound now so established in New York clubs that Macy's has launched a line of fashion accessories. Its philosophic roots are in American funk and British dance-pop, its methodology lurks in the software of the Roland D1555 drum machine, and its current academy is a place called the Music Institute in Detroit, where guru Magic Juan Atkins conducts his seminars to entirely non-alcoholic beverages. The sleeve reads like a late-19th-century artistic manifesto: "Think of Detroit and you automatically think of Motown, but be careful not to think too loud because the new grandmasters of Detroit Techno hate history. Juan Atkins, 26 years old and the self-proclaimed captain of the Techno sound, is an articulate enemy of Motown's supreme being." No doubt *Spy* editors might detect a mild outbreak of Irony here, but don't worry. Even though Magic Juan shows no sign (as yet) of admitting to being a lawyer, he seems serious enough. He even has a sociology: "Berry Gordy built Motown on the same principles as the conveyor belt at the Ford plant. Today, the automobile plants use robots and computers . . . and I'm more interested in Ford's robots than Gordy's music." The earnestness is not even undermined by Magic's final, solemn revelation: "The music is just like Detroit. A complete mistake." There are some ironies, I guess, you just have to take seriously.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

Andrew Sullivan, a former TNR associate editor, lives in Boston's South End.

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